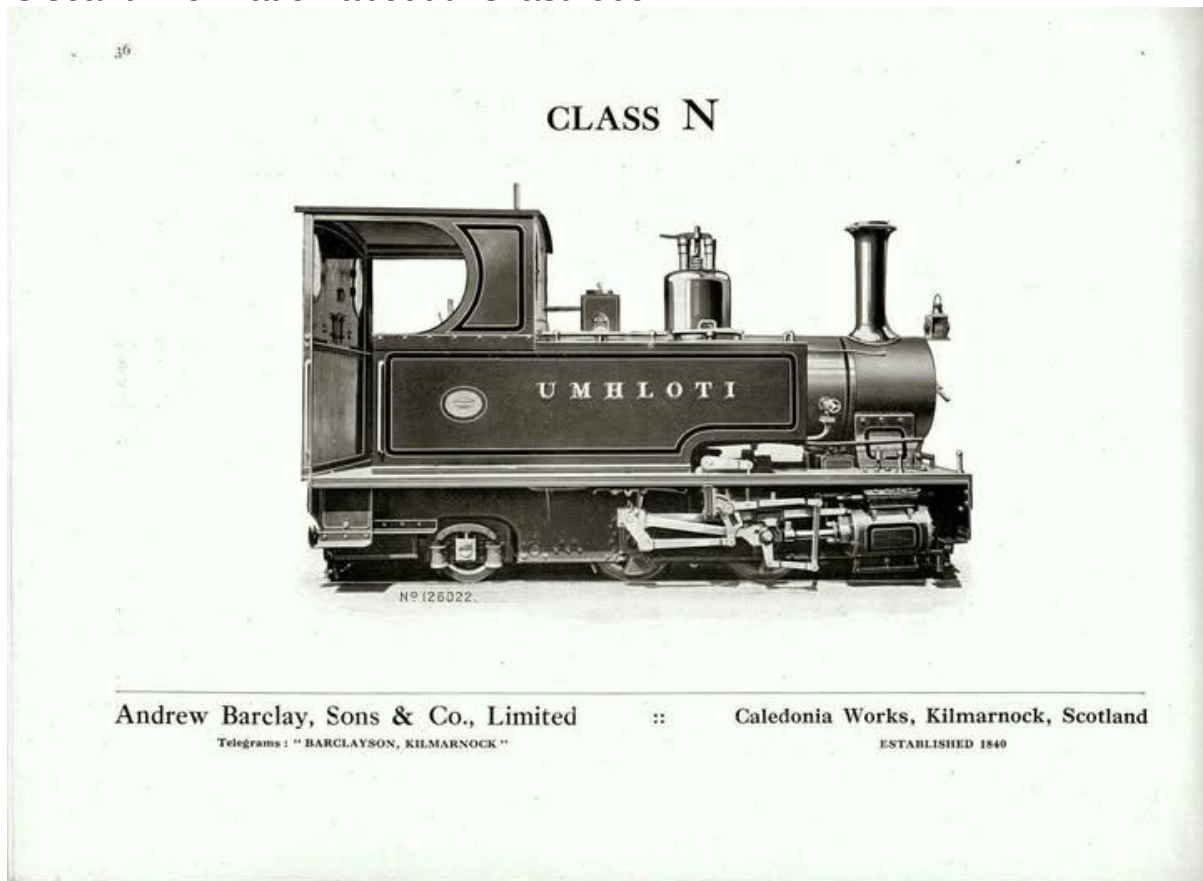


Sugarcane Locos – Where are they now?

The Tongaat Bagnalls

The Tongaat Sugar Company had a supply relationship with W G Bagnall of Stafford England which endured over 40 years and involved 14 locos for its 2' gauge tramline system. In fact, only one of Tongaat's steam locos bought new was not a Bagnall and that was the first loco the company purchased which was an 0-4-0 Fowler named 'HOPE' – works number 8123 of 1898. As an aside, three additional second hand steam locos were added to the roster when Tongaat acquired the Umhloti Valley Central Sugar Company - an Orenstein and Koppel 0-4-0 no 3460 of 1909, an Andrew Barclay 0-4-2 no 1459 of 1916 named 'UMHLOTI' and allegedly an 1899 Avonside purchased from Rand Mines in 1920. There is scant information about this last loco.



Works photograph of Barclay 1459 of 1916.

The first three of Tongaat's 14 Bagnalls, all 4-4-0 tank locos apart from the first which was a 2-4-0, were works numbers 1800 of 1906, 1873 of 1907 and 1929 of 1910 named 'TONGAAT', 'SUCCESS' (photograph in October NSC) and 'REPEAT' respectively. These had cylinder sizes 9" x 14". Some sources allege that the first loco namely 'TONGAAT' was sold

to Rustenburg Platinum Mines as their no 1 but Allan Baker believes the loco was scrapped in 1932. (Refer October 2026 North Star Chronicles for Allan Baker's article on the Tongaat Bagnalls).

It is perhaps significant that another loco of the same name arrived in 1933. 'REPEAT' was scrapped probably prior to the Second World War. 'SUCCESS' was sold to R Scott in 1948 but whether this was the entire loco or just the boiler which was not removed from the boiler register until July 1953, is not known.

The next 11 locos all had larger cylinder sizes – 10" x 15" and were numbered and named as follows:

2287 of 1926 – 'SINEMBE'

2342 of 1928 – 'MONA'

2374 of 1929 – 'ISIBUTU'

2471 of 1932 – 'WEWE'

2479 of 1933 – 'TONGAAT'

2522 of 1935 – 'SIMPOLA'

2599 of 1939 – 'WJ MIRRLEES'

2627 of 1940 – 'A BOULLE'

2647 of 1941 – 'EDWARD SAUNDERS'

2819 of 1946 – 'CHARLES WHYTOCK'

2820 of 1946 – 'EGOLOMI' (renamed 'ROBERT ARMSTRONG')

Bearing in mind the 11 locos were built over a period of 20 years it is not surprising that there were many quite significant differences between them e.g. tanks, bunkers, boiler sizes, boiler pressure, even wheelbases and types of design and construction. (Refer NSC October 2026 for drawings and a schedule of differences between the locos – both compiled by Leith Paxton).

Inevitably given the passage of time and the dimming of memories there is also some controversy surrounding the locos. For example, a distinguishing feature of many Bagnall narrow gauge locos including the Tongaat ones was that they were built with a so called marine (circular) firebox and "bull head" boilers. Some have alleged that the former made maintaining the fire and clearing the firebox of ash a more difficult task than normal. Others refute this and maintain that the task was 'dead easy'! The proponents of "bull head" boilers would maintain that that they had significant advantages, namely:

- Cheap to build because of the relatively low number of stays
- Easy to repair
- Foolproof in use (unskilled personnel could handle them without damaging them)
- Not susceptible to bad water/scaling/sand etc (Graeme Walton-Binns has reported that he took barrow loads of muck, mainly sand from the shells of his locos inferring that maintenance was minimal

at least in their later years. He also reported finding scores of bits of old electric household wire stuffed in the 'lube' system of two of the locos. Despite the neglect and abuse to which they were subjected, they still worked – a tribute to the designers and builders).

However, even the company in the form of the then Managing Director of W G Bagnall, W A Smyth, following a visit to South Africa in 1954 intimated that:

"All our locomotives here have the 'bull head' boiler which gives a fair amount of trouble with cracked throatplates and boiler rings (details available). When the new inquiry is issued we should offer a conventional steel firebox and not the 'bull head' type."

Nevertheless, the fact that Tongaat kept going back for more is indicative of operational robustness and that overall the advantages of the locos outweighed the disadvantages.

In trying to account for the fate or current location of the Tongaat Bagnalls, as late as 1963, with the exceptions of no 2471 'WEWE' and no 2522 'SIMPOLA' (on loan to Illovo), according to Frank Jux in an article in the Spring 1979 edition of 'The Industrial Locomotive', (refer October North Star Chronicles), all 11 of this class were still present at Maidstone, despite Tongaat having transferred to road transport of cane to the mill, albeit out of use or being used as stationary boilers.

There is speculation that 'WEWE' was to be the subject of an experiment for conversion to diesel power. There is evidence of parts being ordered for this purpose but no proof of the work being undertaken.

From boiler records it has been established that the original boiler from 'WEWE' was sold to a Rhodesian buyer in 1951 but the rest of the loco remains unaccounted for. Its most likely fate was the scrapping torch in the early sixties.

'WJ MIRRLEES' was in a derelict condition in 1964 and was probably scrapped.

In around 1964 four of the Tongaat Bagnall locos were sold to Reynolds Brothers (Sezela). The information below was supplied by John Middleton:

'SEZELA no 23' ('ROBERT ARMSTRONG' i.e. 'EGOLOMI') In April 1972, 2820 with boiler 27438 and bearing 'ISIBUTU's plates was shipped to the UK as deck cargo by Bernard Iatham, according to Frank Jux the then chairman of Narrow Gauge Society. Later the loco went to Knebworth Park and Wintergreen Railway, from there to the North Gloucestershire Narrow Gauge Group at Toddington before being bought by Statfold after being sent there for repairs.

'SEZELA No 24' ('ISIBUTU') 2374 with boiler 27830 Scrapped c1976.

'SEZELA No 25' ('SIMPOLA') 2522 with boiler 27831 was sold to Hugo Luckman of Houston Texas before being resold to the Bucher family owned, Hempstead & Northern Railroad at Hempstead outside Houston. 'SEZELA No 26' ('TONGAAT' but with 'SINEMBE' plates) 2479 with boiler 27621 scrapped c1976.

'Sezela No 27' ('A BOULLE') 2627 with boiler 27514 sold to Mr GG Titren of Himeville for use as a stationary boiler in August 1974. It was on sold to Graeme Walton-Binns in 1998.

A loco named 'TONGAAT' but bearing works no 2342 i.e. 'MONA' was donated to the Durban City Council who plinthed it in Bulwer Park in September 1967. In 1992 this loco was moved to Midmar Dam but following the demise of the Midmar Historical Village was removed to the Inchanga Nursery where sadly, scrap thieves dismantled it during the Covid epidemic.

In October 1966 a loco named 'EDWARD SAUNDERS' but bearing the works number 2287 i.e. 'SINEMBE' was preserved at the Maidstone, Mill Club later being acquired by a UK purchaser (presumably Graeme Walton-Binns) and shipped to the Welsh Highland Railway in 1993 before moving to Riverside near Middlesbrough in the north west of England, along with 2819 'CHARLES WHYTOCK'. The two locos were joined around 1998 by 2627 'A BOULLE'.

'EDWARD SAUNDERS' itself i.e. works no 2647 was scrapped in 1978. 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' 2819 was in use as a stationary boiler at the mill until withdrawn in 1968. It was then placed on display at the company offices at Maidstone but moved to Prospecton with that name, around 1976 at the inception of the industrial estate there. It was returned to Maidstone in 1981 but was repatriated to the UK in 1993 (arriving in 1994) at the same time as 'EDWARD SAUNDERS' ('SINEMBE'). Therefore, a total of four Bagnalls were returned to the UK and one ('SIMPOLA') went to the USA.

This article supplements what appeared in the October 2026 edition of the North Star Chronicles, which is a sort of introduction to the subject if you like. This can also be accessed via the North Star website. If you have not read this introduction to the Tongaat Bagnalls, the October article contains some historical photos and useful references e.g. drawings and a schedule of differences between the 11 locos and also articles by Frank Jux and Allan Baker which appeared in the Spring 1979 edition of the Industrial Locomotive, the journal of the Industrial Locomotive Society.

Just one word of caution, events described herein largely occurred some 50 years ago and with the habit of sugar companies to swap parts around it is inevitable mistakes will have been made.

Now we move on to what happened to the 'saved' Tongaat Bagnalls starting with the one that went to the USA namely 'SIMPOLA'. Thereafter the four that were returned to the UK will be covered.



'SIMPOLA' allegedly on the Hempstead and Northern Railway on the Bucher Estate at Hempstead Texas. Photographer unknown.

As an aside, there are two other former South African locos there in the form of a NGG13, No 50 and a NG15, No 18.



'CHARLES WHYTOCK' at Portmadog in 1997 being loaded for transport to Riverside. Photographer Graeme Walton-Binns

The four locos returned to the UK are as follows: works numbers 2287 ('SINEMBE'), 2627 ('A BOULLE' after a sojourn as a stationary boiler on a farm/sawmill in Himeville), 2819 ('CHARLES WHYTOCK') and works no 2820 'EGOLOMI' renamed 'ROBERT ARMSTRONG' and now even more confusingly not only carrying 'ISIBUTU's' name plate but confirmed to have boiler no 27438 previously fitted to the scrapped 'WJ MIRRLEES'! The first three of the four at one stage belonged to Mr Graeme Walton-Binns who spent many years restoring them at Riverside in Yorkshire, the work being undertaken by the owner by himself. Given the state the locos were in when acquired one can only marvel at the patience and dedication required to restore them. The task was truly massive. A few examples will illustrate the point.

On 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' the front cross frame bracing is a huge pressing. The builders forgot to drill it for the bogie cross play and pivot oiling pipes. These had never been oiled since new hence there was no side play as the bogie was seized solid. The result was the loco ran as a sort of long wheelbase 0-8-0 all its life and had huge flange wear on the rear wheels. One can only speculate the wear on the track as a result!

It took five months of work to free the seized bogie side play mechanism and the wheels had to be re-profiled down to the last turning. One of the wheels had a flaw requiring its replacement and sadly it too had to be machined down to the smaller diameter to match the other three.

'SINEMBE's' wheelbase (4') is longer than all the others (3'6") but the engine is much shorter with two long side bunkers only, a smaller boiler and smaller dome. This loco had been crashed resulting in the front frames being badly bent. These were straightened and the rear frame extensions removed.

All three locos were fitted with new exact profile cast chimneys. New correct profile dome covers, tanks and bunkers were made.

Fortuitously, not only were three locos from different batches preserved by Graeme Walton-Binns but they also have the "correct" (not original, but the same 'type' as originally fitted to the locos concerned) boilers as follows:

- 2287 'SINEMBE' – 'original' - boiler no 27514 150psi built 1941
- 2627 'A BOULLE' – 'intermediate' - boiler no 27718 160psi built 1948
- 2819 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' 'final design' – boiler no 27622 160psi built 1946

'SINEMBE's' and 'A BOULLE's' boilers were swapped by Graeme Walton-Binns to achieve this result.

'A BOULLE' has the 'final design' or 'improved' boiler which is the same as the one on 'Charles WHYTOCK' except for the existence of two large

manholes, to facilitate inspections, on the former. One of the manholes is located in the bottom of the firebox and the other in the bottom of the boiler drum.



Boilers of 'SINEMBE' (left) and 'A BOULLE' (right) without its smokebox at Riverside in September 2010



Boiler plate of 'SINEMBE'. Riverside September 2010



Boiler plate of 'A BOULLE' Riverside September 2010



***Boiler plate of 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' Riverside September 2010
This was the original boiler which it seems to have kept its entire life.***



'CHARLES WHYTOCK' (left?) and 'A BOULLE' (right?) up on blocks and without boiler and water tanks. Riverside September 2010.



Firebox 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' (?) Riverside September 2010



'CHARLES WHYTOCK' (?) Riverside September 2010



'A BOULLE' (?) up on blocks. Riverside September 2010



'SINEMBE' as a bit of a meccano set up on blocks. Riverside 2010



'A BOULLE' with 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' behind at Riverside in February 2014



'SINEMBE' with 'A BOULLE' and 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' behind at Riverside in February 2014

This rebuild project endured over many years. In 2010 when I first visited Riverside, restoration still had a long way to go but with the boilers having been hydraulically tested, the valve gear etc on 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' re-assembled, the wheels re-profiled, new brass nameplates cast, exact replica works plates with correct details (apart from the spelling of 'WHYTOCK'!) and new chimneys made, the back of the job had been broken and what an incredible achievement for a 72 year old (in 2010) working by himself.

In order to realise some funds to continue with the restoration of the other two Bagnalls, Graeme Walton-Binns sold 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' to John Heys in 2014 and it was moved to Woody Bay in April of that year. After some further work it passed its steam test later that year.



'CHARLES WHYTOCK' at Woody Bay station in April 2014.

The loco ran in passenger service on the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway in 2015 and 2016, but in March 2017 significant boiler problems were found and it was withdrawn from operation pending repairs.

In October 2019 John Heys sold 'CHARLES WHYTOCK' to the Bagnall 2819 Company Ltd, with all shares owned by a consortium of L&B members. They undertook extensive improvements to the loco, including a new welded boiler from Bennett's, and it re-entered service in August 2024 carrying a maroon livery and a new name, "SIR GEORGE NEWNES". The man after whom the loco is now named was one of the prime movers behind the building of the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway (covered in Volume 3 no 1 of the North Star Chronicles) and the Cliff Railway joining Lynton and Lynmouth (Volume 3 no 4 of the NSC). Those who wish more information on Sir George Newnes should refer to: <https://visitleyntonandlynmouth.com/history-heritage/the-rise-and-fall-of-george-newnes/>



2819 in its new livery at Woody Bay Station shortly after the rebuild. Photographer John Heys.

"SIR GEORGE NEWNES" is now a regular performer at Woody Bay. 2819 is a remarkable survivor (arguably as indeed are the other four Tongaat Bagnalls that have survived). There is a possibly apocryphal story that a start had been made to cut up the loco when it was plinched outside the Tongaat Sugar Corporation company offices, but a manager spotted this being done through the office window, rushed outside to stop the perpetrators, and it was then offered to Graeme Walton-Binns for free. Graeme sold the original works plates and the "PROSPECTON" plates to help recover some of the shipping cost. Subsequently he had new maker's plates cast with the incorrect spelling of 'WHYTOCK' on the basis of the information gleaned from the Baker/Civils tome on Bagnalls of Stafford.

2820 'EGOLOMI' but carrying 'ISIBUTU's plates, upon its return to the UK in 1972, first went to the Knebworth Park Railway but later spent many years at Toddington on the North Gloucestershire Railway. After a visit to the West Highland Railway (Porthmadog) in 2007 during which a troublesome regulator valve was encountered, the loco was taken directly to Statfold Barn Railway in Staffordshire for repairs and subsequently acquired by them.



'ISIBUTU' ('EGOLOMI') at Knebworth Park Railway. Photographer unknown.

The result is 'ISIBUTU', neé 'EGOLOMI' and sometime 'ROBERT ARMSTRONG', now resides in operational condition in the loco's home county of the builders, Staffordshire (albeit part of the Statfold railway track cross into the neighbouring Warwickshire!)



'ISIBUTU' ('EGOLOMI') without plates? at Statfold Barn, March 2009

A similar outcome eventuated with 'A BOULLE' which it is now owned jointly by Graeme Walton-Binns and his daughter Suzanne Ball. The loco was transferred to Statfold Barn in 2023 where it is on display.



'A BOULLE' at Statfold Barn February 2025. Photograph Wikimedia
That leaves 'SINEMBE'. This loco was moved to the Welsh Highland Railway in 1994.



'SINEMBE' at Portmadog. Photographer Graham Walton-Binns?

It was then moved to Riverside under the ownership of Graeme Walton-Binns and an extended period of restoration commenced.

In 20?? 'SINEMBE' was moved to Teifi Valley Railway where it awaits final restoration.

It is remarkable that 5 out of the 11 (or 14 if the earlier ones are included) Tongaat Bagnalls have survived and will be preserved for posterity. With respect to those which were not so fortunate there is still uncertainty surrounding them, particularly the dates when they were moved or scrapped. Please will anyone who can clarify the situation contact me, David Cairns at shares@iafrica.com or telephone number 082 653 5642. For the sake of copying/recording for posterity, any photos particularly cine shots of any of these locos would be welcome.

Anyone interested in building a model of this class of loco in 16mm scale can refer to a construction series by Keith Bucklitch which commenced in May 2009 in the UK bi-monthly publication "16 mm Today".

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