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THE NORTH STAR CHRONICLES – a newsletter primarily for the model railway fraternity

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Editorial

My brother from KZN paid us a visit in early August. He and his wife had meandered to Knysna via Sterkfontein dam and Ficksburg where they had stayed at Sandstone Estates. There they had bought a book on The Sandstone Steam Railway - the story continues, by David Richardson which my brother kindly gave to me. Reading the book brought back happy memories of my numerous visits to Sandstone while we were living in KZN. It also joined several threads which last month's, this edition and future articles in the NSC will at least partially join.

Starting with Sandstone: for the benefit of overseas readers, in the unlikely event they are unaware, Sandstone Steam Railway is a world class, primarily steam preservation operation, on some 7300 hectares of farmlands centred on Hoekfontein at Ficksburg in the Eastern Free State. It has been established for more than a quarter of a century. While the 15 km line traversing the property and the 29km round trip, is of 2' gauge, there is also a collection of 3' 6" gauge steam locomotives which were previously operated by the SAR.

There are several videos about the operation available on Youtube including:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgrLOxZ6PeM
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6a4lfckCKE
https://www.youtube.com/shorts/TO4SUWgaQ6o
https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Aj-cu_B9Vn8
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ac_D4UEIAw

Former South African sugar estate locomotives preserved at Sandstone

Wilfred Mole has stated that Sandstone's role is to preserve locos/wagons/etc. from being scrapped but also to prevent them from being moved overseas. Sandstone, since the turn of the century has done an outstanding job in the preservation movement in this country. And of course, it is not only railway items but also agricultural, military and other transport equipment. Anyone interested in heritage preservation should be grateful for that. However, it should be noted that Sandstone only got into the preservation business in the late nineteen nineties and that many of the items which had not been exported had been exposed to the elements for nearly 30 years prior to that. I would argue that we should be grateful that many locos were also saved by them going overseas during that time.

I moved to Kwazulu Natal in the early months of 1972 just missing the last of tramline operations on the sugar estates (apart from the Umfolozi flats 2' 6" diesel powered operation). One weekend I visited Sezela and lined up just outside the mill yard as they had been for some two years was a line of abandoned steam locos. What a sad sight! Anyway, later that week I happened to run in to Frank Jones the then MD of C G Smith, the company which owned Sezela and mentioned to him that I had just paid a visit to the mill to view the locos. His immediate response was "you want one? Come and take it away!"

What was an impecunious, newly married, 27 year old going to do with a cane loco? But I still have regrets…….

Fortunately, there were others in a different financial situation and it is thanks to them that several of the Sezela locos were saved. The problem as far as Wilfred Mole is concerned is that many of those who did the saving were from overseas. Perhaps the contrary view is that were it not for the likes of Peter Rampton, Graeme Walton-Binns and Graham Lee there would be far fewer preserved and indeed in steam, narrow gauge locos in particular, today.

My favourite loco at Sandstone for reasons which will become evident, is a 1914 Fowler, works no 14316 of 1914, post sugar estate retirement numbered no 6 and given the name 'SANDY'.

I was friends with the late Athol Campbell, indeed he was best man at our wedding. Athol was the great grandson of Marshall Campbell after whom KwaMashu is named and the grandson of 'WAC' Campbell, the last chairman of Natal Estates before it was taken over by Huletts in the so-called sugar wars in 1962. Huletts was taken over the following year by S&T Investments, a consortium of the other major players in the sugar industry namely C G Smith and Tongaat. But I digress. The point of mentioning all this is that Athol used to regale me with stories about the cane locos on Natal Estates. This stimulated my interest in them and in particular 'SANDY' which was at Midmar at the time and which I viewed while it was there.



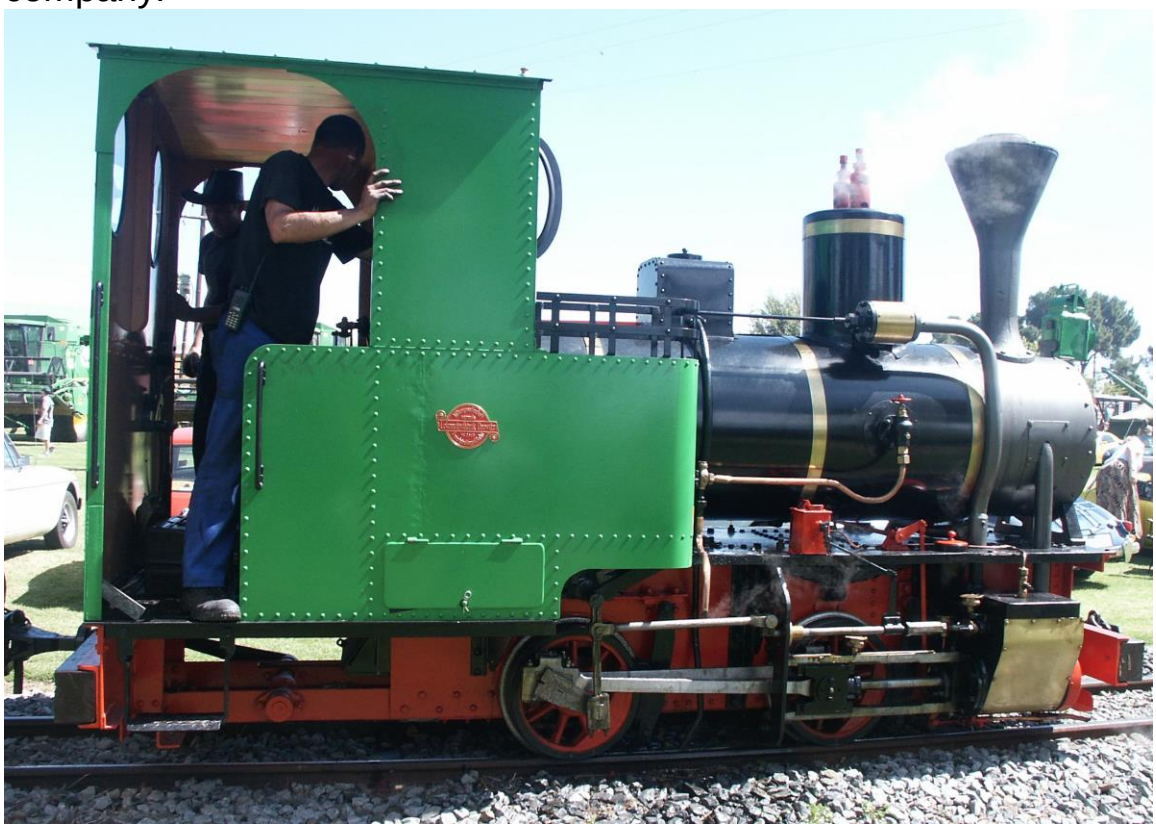
'SANDY', Fowler no 14316 of 1916 at Sandstone in April 2005.

After some 50 years' service at Natal Estates as their no 4 and named 'S (Sandy?) SMITH' according to John Middleton, 14316 was sold to Free State Geduld where it is believed it acquired the name 'SANDY'. It eventually found its way to the Midmar Museum where a tender was added by the late Dick Collyer. When the museum folded, it was sold in 1998 to Ratanga Junction where it experienced a number of problems leading to its acquisition by Sandstone in 2002 and given number no 6. There are several other steam locos at Sandstone which originated from the Natal sugar industry, my primary interest. Staying with the north coast, there is an Avonside 0-4-0 (restored by Sandstone as 1624 of 1913 but it may be 1583 of 1910 or a combination of both?) built new for Huletts and becoming Felixton no 1. It was transferred to Darnall around 1928 becoming Darnall no 4 and then no 1 in the 1939 renumbering.



AE 1624? Originally Darnall No 4 but renumbered to No 1 in 1939. Named 'XANTHE' by Sandstone. Photo courtesy of Sandstone.

It is unclear when this loco was withdrawn from service and exactly what happened after that. What is known is that Darnall no 8 (Avonside 1583) was donated to the Bloemfontein Society of Model Engineers. Either this locomotive or and /or Avonside 1624 was preserved by Jan Hugo at Loxton in the Northern Cape. A loco, (now presumed as Avonside 1624) was moved circa 1974 (although this date is much earlier than the Hugo collection being dispersed) to Upington Power Station where it remained for around 10 years. In circa 1984 it was moved to AECI Midlands Work, and then Sasolburg Model Engineering Society in a dismantled state by 1990. It was closely examined at Sasolburg and both cylinders were stamped 1624 and it carried boiler 26718. The locomotive then moved to SANRASM in 1995 where it remained until 2010 before being acquired by Sandstone and moved to Bloemfontein for a complete rebuild by Lukas Nel. It was first seen at Sandstone in its rebuilt form at Stars of Sandstone in 2014. So, 1583 or 1624 or a combination of both? Take your pick. Foregoing information supplied by John Middleton.
There is another ex Huletts mill 0-4-0 Avonside at Sandstone in the form of works no 1994 of 1928 but this is even more of a meccano set than 1624. One wonders if that set of parts will ever be put together again.
Finally, with respect to locos that worked on systems serving Hulett mills, there is an Orenstein & Koppel 0-4-0 allegedly bought new by the company.



O&K no 2510 of 1907 photographed in April 2008

This small loco's origins and where and when it spent its working days at Huletts are shrouded in mystery***.*** What is known is that it was subsequently sold to Luipaardsvlei Estates and Gold Mining Co. After being in a number of locations, the loco was bought in poor condition

from a restaurant at Halfway House between Joburg and Pretoria. As with so many of the former tramline locos which had been plinthed following their retirement, the O&K required extensive restoration by Lukas Nel and his team at Bloemfontein.
Now we move to the south coast and Illovo Sugar Estates from where Kerr Stuart works no 4063 of 1924 originally named ‘ISE no 3’ but now called ‘TAMARA’, spent its working life.



ISE No 3 prior to restoration. Photographer unknown.



Illovo Sugar Estates no 3, Kerr Stuart 4063 of 1924 after restoration. ***Photo courtesy Sandstone.***

After being plinthed in a park next to the Illovo sugar mill it was donated to the RSSA (Railway Society of South Africa) in 1988 and in 1991 moved to the Midmar Historical Village. Sandstone acquired the loco in 1998 when the Midmar Museum folded. What followed after some years was an extensive rebuild including returning the loco to its original saddle tank format.

Moving further south, we find ex 'SEZELA No 3' an Avonside works no 2035 of 1929. This loco has a complicated life story as according to John Middleton again, there have been three locos which bore the 'SEZELA No 3' plates! The first was Avonside 1721 of 1915 which went to the Esperanza Estate in April 1951 as their no 6. The second was Avonside 1936 of 1924 (formerly 'RENISHAW No 1) which went to Esperanza as their no 7 sometime between 1964 and 1968. Third was Avonside 2035 of 1929 but first numbered 'SEZELA No 14'. 2035 was built as an 0-6-0 but rebuilt as an 0-4-0, date unknown. During the 1960s, Sezela extensively rebuilt four of its Avonsides with Walschaerts valve gear and in some case new frames and boilers. This was the case with 2035 in 1967 so it is essentially a new loco. Following the closure of Sezela's tramline system, the loco was purchased by Dunn's of Witbank and just prior to that company going into liquidation it was bought by Charles Viljoen before ending up with Sandstone. As with so many locos, this one went through an extensive restoration at Hoekfontein and Stevens Mechanical Workshop in Howick.



'SEZELA No 3' photographed in the Sandstone shed in April 2011



Originally 'UMHLOTI', Barclay 1459 of 1916. Photographed in July 2005 with the tender built at the Midmar Museum for 'SANDY'.

The Barclay was ordered for the Umhloti Valley Sugar Co, a company acquired by Tongaat and renamed 'EGOLOMI'. Post retirement, it was acquired by Dunns of Witbank. After standing outside for many years it was acquired by Hannes Paling where after it was bought by Sandstone. A lengthy restoration followed including the fitting of a new and longer boiler which required the frames to be extended.

Having covered the former sugar locos at Sandstone, we move on to the other preserved locos scattered throughout KZN.

First, plinthed at the now closed Huletts Darnall mill to the north of Durban is an 0-4-0 Avonside, no 1740 of 1916, Darnall no 4 (nicknamed 'MR BUSS'?) The loco's works plates were sold at auction in December 2021.



Avonside 1740 of 1916 ('MR BUSS') at Darnall. April 2019 photo John Browning.

At the neighbouring mill to the south, Gledhow, where the loco spent its entire working life, Hunslet 2647 of 1942 ‘CHAKAS KRAAL No 5’ is plinthed.



Hunslet 2647 of 1942*. *April 2019 photograph by John Browning.

This loco was built by Hunslet to Kerr Stuart’s pre bankruptcy (1930) Tamar design.



Sezela in 1950? 1960? 1970? No! 2065 in May 2009 near Ncalu on the Ixopo-Umzimkulu line. Hannes Paling on the footplate!

Moving further inland, we find ‘UVE No 2’, Avonside 2065 of 1933 at Ixopo. ‘UVE No 2’ was the second last of the many Avonsides supplied to the South African sugar industry prior to the company being taken over by Hunslet in 1935. The loco was one of three belonging to the Umtwalumi Valley Estate south of Sezela. Following the change to road transport of cane by Sezela, ‘UVE No 2’ found its way to the Midmar Historical Village in the late eighties where it was overhauled and returned to steam in 1991. When Midmar closed in 1998 the loco was stored on a farm at Merrivale and later at Mason’s Mill in Pietermaritzburg where a new smoke box and new side tanks were fitted. In 2003 the loco was moved again, to Ixopo.
Also at Ixopo, is Avonside works number 2038 of 1929. This loco also has quite a history, starting life as no 3 at the Huletts Darnall mill according to John Middleton and ending up as no 9 according to Google when the tramline system closed in 1967. The loco was plinthed at the Darnall mill sports club before being moved to internal storage because of corrosion. After some years the loco was moved to Inchanga where initial restoration commenced. From there it was transported to the Paton County Narrow Gauge Railway at Ixopo where an extensive restoration took place.



Avonside 2038 of 1929 on the PCNGR. Photographer unknown.

Returning to the coast, but before moving to the south coast, we stop off at the sugar terminals and the loco that is plinthed there. This is another Avonside 0-4-0, works no 1422 of 1900, delivered to Esperanza mill and its 20” gauge system. After being acquired by Reynolds Brothers (Sezela), the mill’s tramline system was converted to 2’ gauge in 1915.



'ESPERANZA No 4' Avonside 1422 of 1900 at the Reception Centre of the Sugar Terminal in Maydon Wharf in 2007.

My understanding is post my visit, a roof was supposed to be placed over the loco to afford some protection against the elements.

First stop on the south cost at Umzinto, at the Indian Quran Study School', is Hunslet 0-4-2 3385 of 1946. This was delivered to Crookes Brothers Renishaw Estate as 'RENISHAW No 6'



'RENISHAW No 6' pre-restoration in its original position in Umzinto. Since moved up a steep hill in Umzinto. 2000 photo Hannes Paling.

Renishaw went off tramline in the late sixties allegedly following a time and motion study in 1965. After retirement, the loco was plinthed at Renishaw, then after floods, at a school as above. It deteriorated but after another move has been cosmetically restored and now has a cover.
At Sezela mill there is yet another Avonside 0-4-0 in the form of 'SEZELA No 1'.



'SEZELA No 1' works number 1719 of 1915. Photograph is part of the Sandstone library and is used with their permission.

This loco spent all its working days at Sezela. After retirement it was moved to Midmar Historical Village but with that project's collapse in 1998 it was returned to Sezela where it is plinthed with the name "Illovo". C G Smith the owner of Sezela mill acquired Illovo in 1977 and in order to align with the brand, the company changed its name to Illovo Sugar in 1994.
At Witbank, sorry eMalahleni, is Avonside 0-4-0 1858 of 1920.



Avonside 1858 at Tiny Tots Academy. Photo Hannes Paling.

According to Google (Hmmm), this loco was originally delivered to Huletts for use on the Tinley Manor Sugar Estate and numbered Darnall 17. Following retirement, in 1968 it was preserved at a school in Stanger. It was moved (for some cosmetic restoration?) to Dunns of Witbank before being finally donated to Tiny Tots Nursery School in Witbank in around 1972. I presume it remains there as it appears on the school's facebook page, but have been unable to confirm that.

Lastly, there are several juries out or maybe the third alternative verdict in Scottish court trials: not proven. Two of them are listed below.

First is Avonside 1888 of 1921, Darnall no 5 according to John Middleton. This was preserved by Jan Hugo at Loxton. There is photographic proof of this. The loco disappeared when the collection was dispersed in the nineteen eighties. But there is no evidence of it being scrapped. Hiding in a barn somewhere?

Next is Avonside 2018 of 1928 - Felixton No 4 which was donated to the Swaziland Technical Institute in Mbabane where it was plinthed. Some maintain it had been scrapped by the middle eighties while others believe it has been preserved. OK preservationists – where?

There is a large amount of outdated and incorrect information about the origins, whereabouts and condition of former sugar industry tramline steam locomotives in the media, particularly Google). Part of the problem as a UK based correspondent put it is that Google does not deal well with non digitised information. I hope I have not contributed to that problem. If any 'qualifying' locos have been overlooked or incorrect information has been published, please bring this to my attention in order that it can be rectified.

It should always be remembered when dealing with sugar industry steam locos that the sugar mills had a habit of swapping parts including even boilers when circumstances necessitated this. The reference article on the Tongaat Bagnalls on the North Star website and the comments above about Avonsides 1624 and 2035 illustrate the difficulties for the (amateur!) historian when trying to identify a particular loco.

Last month's article in the NSC covered the Tongaat Bagnalls. A further article on them has been uploaded to the reference section of the North Star website. This deals inter alia, with the fate of the last remaining Bagnall in this country, 'MONA' but also several other Bagnalls which ended up in preservation in the UK and also 'SIMPOLA' which was shipped to the USA.

https://www.northstarrailway.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Sugarcane-Locos-The-Tongaat-Bagnalls-reference-article.doc.pdf

In conclusion, my thanks to all the people who have contributed to this edition and a couple to come, namely John Middleton, Hannes Paling, Gary Barnes, Dave Richardson, Chris Grimes, Simon Lomax, John Browning.

The end