

David Johnston MP on the footplate of *Robert McAlpine & Sons No. 31* at Didcot Railway Centre. FRANK DUMBLETON

New MP makes track to Didcot

DAVID Johnston, the recently-elected Conservative MP for Wantage, joined hundreds of constituents in visiting Didcot Railway Centre at the start of half-term week on Saturday, February 15.

Mr Johnston was given a tour of the 21-acre site by chief executive Emma Jhita and Great Western Society chairman Richard Preston, who shared the charity's plans for a major upgrade in order to attract more visitors, as outlined last issue.

The MP joined the crew of visiting Hudswell Clarke No.1026 of 1913 0-4-0ST *Robert McAlpine & Sons No. 31* from the Fawley Hill Railway on the centre's branch line.

He also visited the restored 'Swindon Panel' which was once the heart of Swindon signalbox and was used to control trains on Great Western mainline from the 1960s until 2013 and has since been restored allowing visitors to experience a being a signalman.

Drive steam on South Tynedale

TO coincide with the completion of the wide-cabbed Chrzanow 0-6-0WTT No. 3459 of 1957 No. 10 *Naklo*, the South Tynedale Railway is offering three levels of a new steam footplate experience course, including one where participants can also act as guards and signalmen, starting in July.

➜ For more details and to pre-book now telephone 01434 338212 or visit www.south-tynedale-railway.org.uk



NGG16A in storage at Sandstone Estates in 2007. Now its time has finally come. ERROL ASHWELL

'Super modified' Garratt to run again

By John Titlow

THE narrow gauge equivalent of South Africa's 'Red Devil' – a sister locomotive to the Welsh Highland Railway articulated Garratts – is being overhauled to running order at Sandstone Estates.

Sandstone's restoration of 2ft gauge Garratts continues, with NGG16A No. 155 being dragged out of the back of its shed, where it has hidden for many years in Hoekfontein on the Sandstone Railway for a complete overhaul.

What is different this time is that No. 155 is to be restored in its rebuilt state after being converted to the Gas Producer Combustion System (GPCS) with the aim of reducing coal consumption and increasing efficiency.

No. 155 is the second but last Garratt built in the world and also the penultimate steam locomotive to be built for South African Railways. The 2-6-2+2-6-2T was constructed in 1968 by Hunslet Taylor in Johannesburg, South Africa as works number 3900 for the now-abandoned Alfred County Railway (ACR). The ACR operated from Port Shepstone for 76 miles to Harding in KwaZulu, Natal where No. 155 spent its working life until withdrawal.

Technological advances

At the ACR, Garratts Nos. 155 and 141, which was outshopped in 1958 by Beyer Peacock in Manchester were rebuilt by the late engineer Phil Girdlestone and Shaun McMahon, who now lives in South America, using technology similar to that used in the 3ft 6in gauge Class 26 4-8-4 No.3450 'Red Devil' adapted in 1981 by English engineer David Wardale on principles developed by Argentinian engineer Livio Dante Porta to improve locomotive efficiency.

As well as a GPCS, the rebuilding incorporated Porta-type Lempor exhausts, an improved spark arrester, lightweight multi-ring articulated piston valves, improved valve events and improved mechanical lubrication. No. 141 was converted in 1989 and No. 155 the following year. Both locomotives were reclassified NGG16A. The most obvious visible differences between the original and the rebuilt locomotives is the megaphone shaped Lempor chimney which contains a cylindrical mixing chamber and a wide-angled diffuser.

Both locomotives achieved fuel savings against the NGG16s with the costs paying off within a year. There was talk about a super Garratt NGG17, but that never materialised.

When the ACR went bankrupt in 2004, both locomotives were left to deteriorate in the sea air at Paddock. No. 141 was bought by a father-and-son consortium and transferred to Sandstone Heritage Trust in 2007, where it remains today. No. 155 was also privately purchased and moved there, and Sandstone subsequently bought it.

> "The locomotive was inspected and the boiler found to be in restorable condition: a full set of tubes was in stock..."

In a twist of fate at the ACR, NGG16 No. 142 was fitted with the modified engine units from No. 155 unbeknown to Sandstone at the time. It was always in the planning to restore No. 155, but in June 2017 it was revealed that the remaining locomotives at Paddock were to be cut up. Determined efforts by Sandstone to purchase the modified engine units of No. 142 or even the whole locomotive were ignored and the locomotive was scrapped, and so the restoration of No. 155 was placed on hold.

Shaun McMahon is assisting the project by providing the technical details and all the relevant drawings of the extensive modifications to Nos. 141 and 155 that will assist Sandstone's restoration. It was this contact that reignited the No. 155 project in late 2019 and a decision was made to go-ahead with the restoration.

With the successful rebuild of Class NG10 No. 61 that was returned to steam for the Stars of Sandstone in April last year, No.155 became the next in line for the Sandstone treatment. The locomotive was inspected and the boiler found to be in restorable condition: a full set of tubes was in stock and the contract for the boilaer work was awarded to Wonder Steam in Hermanstad, Pretoria.

Survivors

No. 141 has been stored at Hoekfontein at Sandstone for nearly 14 years free of charge, so was looked at and found to be in much poorer condition than No. 155, but with the correct modified engine units in place. There has been little communication with its owners during this period, so it appeared unlikely it was ever to be restored. Negotiations are now taking place with the owners to obtain the modified units.

No. 155 is devoid of most of its fittings, having been 'removed' as it stood at Port Shepstone out of use, but Sandstone has a good supply of spares, including the GMA/M 3ft 6in gauge Garratt lubricator required.

On January 29, the Sandstone lowbed lorry departed for Pretoria with the boiler of No. 155 and another piece of 2ft narrow gauge history is about to begin. The frame and mechanics will be restored in Sandstone's workshops and it will return in its original striking red livery.

Restoration will take around a year and will mark yet another milestone in Sandstone's achievements in preserving South Africa's 2ft gauge.

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