

Railway History Group

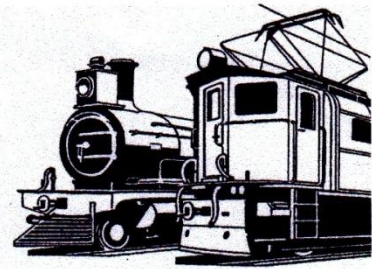
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Editor: Wally Greig



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Class 10CR No 778 at Paarden Eiland 25 June 1962.

Leith Paxton Collection

Editorial

In Bulletin No 121 we published an article titled 'Early Manganese Mining in the Northern Cape'. We omitted to attribute part of this article to an article by Ken Plant in Industrial Railway Record No. 37 of 1971. We apologise for this omission.

The Blue Train is hauled the whole distance of it's journeys, between Cape Town and Pretoria, by two Class 14E locomotives. On 8 February a fire broke out, in one of the locomotives, No. 14001, South of Kimberley. The train finished it's journey behind two Class 14Es. The authorities have not issued any statements about this incident.



Les Smith

Information on the 14E can be found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_African_Class_14E or by doing a Google search on:

class 14e wiki

WATTLE and other FORESTRY RAILWAYS OF NATAL

1

This article is a compilation by John Middleton of research from a number of sources including Robin Lake, Frank Jux, Chris West, Michael Cottrell, Elizabeth Camp and Jill Peters.

The Black Wattle tree (*Acacia Mearnsii*), a species native to Australia was introduced to Natal in South Africa around 1870. It was initially used to create shelter-belts for stock and the wood for fuel and fencing, but tests undertaken in Pietermaritzburg in 1884 showed that the bark contained high levels of tannin which could be used for treating hides for leather production. This led to the tree being widely planted to produce tanning extract for the leather industry. Several companies thus developed wattle plantations from the late 19th Century onwards, in the Natal midlands and at least three introduced tramways to haul the timber to their mills. These have been poorly documented and since the last one in use closed in 1945, they were largely unknown by enthusiasts who focused on the better known narrow gauge SAR or sugar estate lines.

Blinkwater Forest Co. Ltd. The most intriguing of all the lines, albeit short lived, was linked to New Hanover, on the SAR Greytown branch, where there was a large yard. The Blinkwater company was a venture between Hunt, Leuchars & Hepburn (HL&H) (founded in Durban in 1850) and private farmers in the area. People associated with HL&H (today Mondi Forests) have said that a tramway (which seems to have been 2'0" gauge) from the Blinkwater Forests (part of the Karkloof range) to New Hanover was surveyed and built after the 1st World War (circa 1919). The intent was to exploit indigenous hardwood timber from the Blinkwater forests (which lie around 15 km north of New Hanover) and transporting it to the SAR exchange siding. From anecdotal evidence it appears that insufficient investigation had been undertaken on the timber reserves, which proved to be uneconomic, and the whole scheme folded shortly afterwards around 1920 with a significant financial loss, said to be £25000, a considerable sum in those days. Some of the farmers forfeited their farms to HL&H in payment for their portion of the failure. Local sources suggest the disused line was lifted by 1925. In 1994, HL&H together with the Natal Parks Board (now KZN Wildlife) established the Blinkwater Nature Reserve with a network of hiking trails. The KZN Wildlife website notes "*one section of the trail into the Reserve follows the course of the old railway line constructed at the turn of the nineteenth century (sic) to extract timber from the vast indigenous forests on the south slopes of the Blinkwater*". The date quoted of "at the turn of the nineteenth Century" is clearly incorrect. The tramway route and some concrete culverts are still visible in places.

The locomotives used on this line have proven difficult to identify but from the unlikely source of the Rhodesia Herald dated 21 May 1921 comes an advertisement;

"For SALE – Railway materials, sawmill etc at New Hanover, Greytown. Items included one locomotive 12 ½ tons 2'0" gauge, one locomotive 10 ½ tons 2'0" gauge, trucks 2'0" gauge and several miles of 12/16/20 lb rails – Blinkwater Forest Co Ltd c/o Hunt, Leuchars & Hepburn, Durban"

The weight quoted for the two locos does provide a clue as to their identity as secondhand locos of this weight were rare in Natal (sugar estate locos generally being smaller. One possibility might O&K 724 of 1900 from the Stanger – Kearsney Light Railway, this was a 10 ½ ton 50 HP 0-6-0T. Another possibility from the same line might be the "Waterloo" Class 0-4-2T Kerr Stuart (764 of 1903) which is shown in KS records as 11 ½ tons empty, so would have been around 12 ½ tons in working order.

It seems possible that these two locomotives are those which were sold by HL&H in 1922 to the Windy Hill line (see below). From evidence at Windy Hill, it seems that these were already quite old and therefore possibly intended originally as construction locos on the Blinkwater line.

If these were for construction, it raises the intriguing possibility of how Blinkwater intended to operate the line once it was fully operational. Did they, for example, order new locos ?

There is a mysterious batch of four Kerr Stuarts, ordered in 1920 by Durant Radford & Co (a London agent) for George North & Sons of Durban. No link has been established between George North and Blinkwater but it is tempting to speculate that they may have been ordered for the line. We don't know much about North's as they didn't generally deal with sugar estate locos. George Howard North (the eldest son of the late George North of Northdene) was born 19 December 1863 at Snaresbrook. He was educated at the Diocesan College, Rondebosch, Cape Town. George North (senior) had founded George North & Son as agricultural implement merchants with premises at Field Street, Durban and Northdene, Natal. George North (junior) subsequently joined his father's business, becoming Manager and on the latter's death, sole proprietor.



KS 4043 as rebuilt to original condition, Sandstone Estates, May 2013.

John Middleton

So, what of the four locos, 2'0" gauge KS 4056, 4062 and 4063 were 11-ton 8"x12" "Darwin" class 0-4-2ST while KS 4138 was a 3'6" gauge "Huxley" class 0-4-2T. Only KS 4056 and 4138 were actually built in 1920 whereas 4062/63 were only completed in 1923 and 1924 respectively, suggesting the original order had been cancelled or amended. What we do not know is where the locos were delivered, but Kerr Stuart records show that KS 4056/63 and 4138 were at Illovo Sugar by December 1935 (with KS 4062 at Gledhow). If as suggested above, the Stanger-Kearsney Kerr Stuart had gone to Blinkwater, it may have caused the company to consider Kerr Stuart for new locos. Is it therefore too much to speculate that possibly these KS locos were ordered for the abortive Blinkwater scheme? The 1920 order date certainly fits and the delayed

completion for KS 4062/63 suggests a cancelled order. Perhaps, North couldn't cancel the order and eventually found buyers at Illovo and Gledhow. Another linked anecdote is from Neville Fields who visited Illovo in 1943 (in what must be one of the earliest enthusiast reports from SA) and was told by the driver that the loco had come "from a Wattle plantation". If so, KS 4138 would obviously have been intended for SAR exchange sidings. None of the other known "wattle" operations had need for a 3'6" gauge loco at this time and although Blinkwater was not initially described as a "wattle plantation", the investment by local farmers suggests that perhaps wattle planting might have been envisaged later.

Windy Hill Wattle Co Ltd: This operation was just to the east of Wartburg and fortunately we know a little more about it from surviving Company minutes. A 2'0" gauge tramway, 4 miles in length, was proposed in August 1919 and opened in October 1920 with oxen as motive power. A 3'6" gauge private siding (No.538) was also opened at Sandymount in March 1921 on the SAR Schroeders – Bruyns Hill branch some 700 m east of Wartburg. It would not have merited a private loco as it was no more than a short loop and dead-end siding which was still in place (although abandoned) in 2003.

The Windy Hill Company was associated with HL&H since two of the names prominent in the Company minutes were also directors of HL&H. The November 1919 minutes recorded that HL&H had received a quote from the USA for the rails which they had accepted on their own responsibility.



Dutton Road/rail tractor at Windy Hill, from F Dutton Album, SAR Museum. Robin Lake Collection

The minutes discuss possible motive power as a replacement for the oxen being used and in September 1921 a Dutton road/rail tractor was suggested – the company minutes say "*tractor presently in East London, SAR may be prepared to sell for GBP 250*". Possibly this had some connection with the Fort Beaufort – Seymour line which had been proposed for Dutton tractors. Another view expressed in the September 1921 minutes was that locomotive traction might be better and that an offer had been received to "borrow one of the Blinkwater locos" (see above) but no indication at the time whether it actually was. By January 1922 the Dutton tractor was in use but the minutes say "wet weather (was) a problem with the wheel ways". At the same time due to the problems being experienced with the Dutton tractor, HL&H again offered to loan a loco for 3 months during the wet season with an option to buy. Presumably this was again one of

the Blinkwater locos. Dutton actually attended the Windy Hill directors meeting of 22 September 1921 and mentioned a tractor similar to the Canada Junction trial one. The impression from the Minutes is that it was on loan, as there was no mention of approval of a purchase price.



Windy Hill circa 1923. – J Gibson Wattle Hill Wattle Company

Robin Lake Collection.

There is a further reference The Times of London for 31 May 1923 which included a report on Roadrailers. This says "*On the Leachars (sic) Estate, in Natal, a five-mile section has been laid down to connect with the South African Railways at Sandymount., and the first tractor adapted to road-rails is running on this section and doing efficient service*".

By July 1922 the loaned HL&H loco was also reported to be at Windy Hill but was "badly damaged by runaway trucks" and HL&H offered the loan of another whilst the first was "repaired in Durban", during which time it was to be "valued and the price fixed for purchase". By October 1922, both locos had been purchased from HL&H and were working. It seems possible that these were the two locomotives offered for sale at Blinkwater in May 1921 (see below). Photos dated 1923 exist of an O&K 0-6-0T named "WINDY HILL" which may well be O&K 724.

There is a gap in the minutes until 1925 when the locos were referred to as a "heavier one" and a "lighter one" (which matches what we know of the Blinkwater locos, one being 12 ½ tons and the other 10 ½ tons). The smaller was described as "worn out with wheel problems". However, by October 1925, new tyres were being fitted to a loco (but which one is not stated). The statements suggest that the locos were quite old by this time.

In March 1926 the minutes record the decision to purchase a new loco from Orenstein & Koppel in Germany which was then (according to the minutes in October 1926) lost when the SS Cawdor Castle ran aground in July 1926 in Conception Bay on the "Skeleton Coast" north of Swakopmund (this was presumably O&K 9439 of 1926 a 2'0" gauge 0-6-0WT ordered by HL&H). Now interestingly, the SS Cawdor Castle did not sink, it only ran aground (in fact the wreck can still be seen today), so an intriguing thought is that the remains of O&K 9439 may still be on board as salvage from the remote Skeleton Coast in 1926 seems unlikely. The October 1926 minutes go on to say a "new loco had been ordered" as a replacement for the lost loco and

this was O&K 11259 of 1926, a 55HP 0-6-0WT which is shown in O&K lists as ordered by HL&H for Windy Hill Wattle.

The minutes for January 1927 contain a discussion about "what to do with the old loco" (singular) but there is no further reference. Presumably the older locos were scrapped.

O&K 11259 seems to have gone quietly about its wattle hauling activities until 1945 when the line closed. The Natal Mercury for 4 July 1945 advertised "*locomotive, 5 miles railway, 12 points and crossings, 3 sets timber trucks, 11 8-wheel bogie trucks, 5 pairs truck wheels and 1950 sleepers*". Huletts Sugar bought the whole lot for £3500 and the loco went to Darnall sugar estate where it lasted until scrapped in the 1960s.



Unknown Wattle line – Collection Pietermaritzburg Archives.

Robin Lake Collection

Harden Heights Wattle Co: This is another company that may have had a tramway. The Windy Hill minutes for December 1919 suggested that Harden Heights Wattle Co was going to build the wagons for the new Windy Hill line.

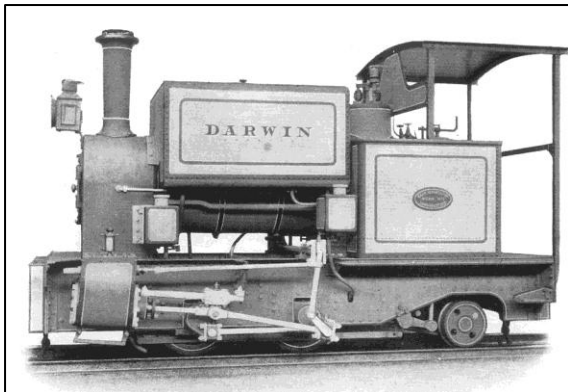
Hillcrest – Waterfall Railway: Elizabeth Camp, author of "Lest we forget – the story of Hillcrest" (1999) makes two references to this line based on research by Jill Peters in 1989. Waterfall, also known as Upper Langefontein was a sub-division of the Langefontein farm of 6000 acres established by a Gerrit P Kemp in 1851. By 1900 Waterfall was said to be owned by Willem Heinrich Dinkelman who had a narrow gauge railway which was used for transporting "wattle bark and gum logs". A saw mill was erected at Mill Road, Hillcrest and local sources say that it "was linked to the farm at waterfall by narrow gauge railway, complete with diminutive steam engine". Camp also says that Hillcrest families used to use the train to travel to Waterfall for picnics so it must have had some sort of rolling stock suitable for passenger use. It is not clear if the line ran as far as the SAR station in Hillcrest on the Natal main line. Traces of the line are

said to exist on the western side of Inanda Road on the approach to waterfall. The identity of the locomotive and its fate remain a mystery.

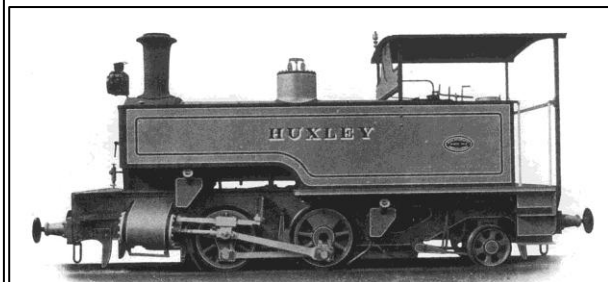
Lidgetton Railway. Elizabeth Camp has also reported that her family farm at Lidgetton was linked to the Natal main line by a narrow gauge railway. No further details are known.

Clan Syndicate Ltd: this was established before 1900 by the Mackenzie brothers and others including a Major Leuchars. A mill was built at Cramond some 32 km from Pietermaritzburg on the north side of the SAR Greytown line. A 2'0" gauge tramway ran from the mill to forests in the Karkloof area. Operation of the line is thought to have initially been by gravity with oxen hauling the empty wagons back to the forest, however in 1911 Orenstein & Koppel supplied a 50 HP 0-4-0WT to the company (O&K 4466 of January 1911). A photo dated May 1913 exists of a locomotive in use which may be this one. No further information has been found on this line or how long it lasted but a later report stated that the locomotive had run away and crashed into the mill.

The mill was also served by 3'6" gauge private siding No. 367 which branched off adjacent to Cramond halt and ran about 2 km in a north easterly direction to the mill. There is no record of a private loco before 1951 so possibly it was shunted by SAR until that date. However, in that year the company obtained an A class 4-8-2T No. 100 from SAR. In 1963 an ex ZASM B class 0-6-4T was acquired from ESCOM, Rosherville where it was ZASM No. 3. It seems rail traffic ceased sometime between 1966 and 1970.

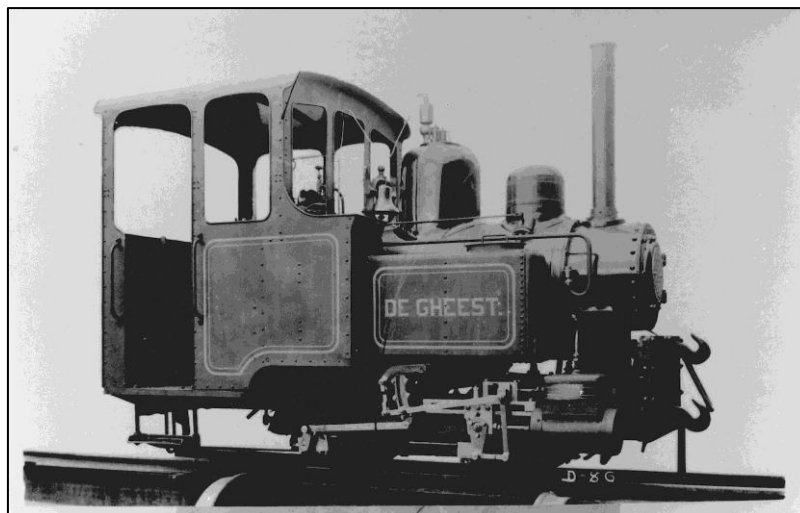


KS Darwin Class



KS Huxley Class

Locomotive De Gheest



The photo of the locomotive named De Gheest, was found among Davfe Rhind's photos. Dave was a meticulous researcher and it was, thus, unusual that he left no details about the locomotive or where he obtained the photo.

Leith Paxton, John Middleton and Robin Lake were asked if they could supply any information, about this loco. Their replies are given below.

Leith 5 January 2014:

This is one of those South African mysteries. She was built by the Dickson Mfg Co at a time when several other of their products were being built and shipped out to SA. However, unlike most of their others products, which have been accounted for, little more is known of her, other than the entry in their Dickson works list which states,
No.990 5-21-1898 A.Koppel for South Africa - De Gheist - 0-4-0T 22-6x9 60 cm
I believe the name means 'the ghost' 'spirit'.

Because of the double couplers, the thought was she could have been used in a Narrow guage, colliery etc. It could also be the Mossel Bay mystery loco but isn't. Don't know if Robin or John can add more. I know both of you have given her more that a passing glance.

John Middletom 5 January 2014.

The closest I can get is French or Flemish. I suspect it may be someone's name as "De Gheest" is a surname in both France and Belgium (but not in Holland). There is a famous "Maurice de Gheest" (1850-1920) who founded a French horse race in 1922 that's still run to this day.

De Gheest does not translate to Ghost - at least as far as I can get with any on-line translation tools.

So lets assume its Flemish or French, and it is someone's name. That suggests possibly Congo - may be as a workshop shunter (it doesn't have a headlight and its water tanks are tiny - suggesting very short distance shunting). There is nothing in the Congo book, so it will need more research to see if someone named de Gheest was involved with any of the Congo lines. There is a problem with this, while there were 60 cm gauge lines in Congo by 1898 - the first 3'6" gauge line was only in 1903, so why the dual gauge couplers ?

Perhaps we are on the wrong track completely and the Dickson records are wrong. May be more research here in the US - not sure what Dickson material survives.

Robin Lake 10 January 2014.

Following the Dutch language route enquiries made at the Netherlands Foundation come up with The Spirit as the most likely meaning of De Gheest. The modern spelling would be Geest. Compare with our Afrikaans "hy het gees" = he has spirit.
Wish we had a view of the rear of the Loco. The lack of front (at least) buffing gear is interesting. It would seem that when wagons were coupled to the front of the loco the intention was to pull only and not propel. Of course the wagons may have had the buffing gear to bear against the large "coupling plate" of the loco.

The arrangement smacks of some sort of merry-go-round track operation as maybe used in a smelter or other industrial set up.

Talking dual gauge - nothing to do with the above really - I have a note from many moons ago "Robinson Gold Mining Company - second postcard view dual gauge". This arose from a visit to a postcard web site, but on Googling again damned if I can find the Robinson card. Google "gold mine postcards" then go into "mining related postcards of southern africa" Perhaps I was looking at the wrong locale for the Robinson. It is a pity that not every mine has postcards attributed to it.

John Middleton 10 January 2014

Thanks - I hadn't considered the front buffing gear issue, although such an arrangement could work if the loco was linked to whatever it was hauling by means of a fixed link. However, I have been wondering if the loco was actually for some highly specialised purpose, not normal haulage. Ideas that I wondered about were a traverser loco (as used at Derby Carriage Works for example - and I am sure other places) or possibly for moving ships on a quay (Panama canal style).

Lots of the gold mines had dual gauge track and are a possibility of course. I was going to try and check whether the name "De Gheest" showed up as a Director of any of the prominent reef mines but I haven't got around to it. I have a 1902 Year Book and checked the Robinson entries - nothing.

Robin Lake 10 January 2014

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John Middleton 11 January 2014

I had another look through my 1902 "Mines of the Transvaal" and I have found a "De Gheest". I am not making any assumptions about whether there is a connection but it does give food for thought.

A certain C.D. De Gheest was a Director of ERPM as well as at least one of its subsidiaries Angelo Gold Mines. ERPM was part of the Farrar Brothers Group at this time which in turn was part of the Anglo-French mining house, C.D De Gheest was on the board of Farrar as well.

I did a web search on this chap and he had his fingers in other pies as he was a Director also of "De Nationale Bank Der Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek Beperk" as well as being mentioned as very influential in the Transvaal..