

# PRESERVATION

## SOUTH AFRICAN STYLE

**John Titlow** describes his 2019 South African preservation experience, taking in a couple of museums and ending with the 'Stars of Sandstone' gala

**P**rimarily it all started as a railway trip to South Africa to visit the 'International Sandstone Festival' but Sandstone is not just about railways, if you are into any sort of historic transport, tractors, traction engines and machinery, then Sandstone is the place that you dream of.

The internet is a marvellous thing especially when trying to find information about one

subject it will pull up something completely different and unexpected, this happened when researching the Reefsteamers Railway Locomotive Depot in Germiston that the James Hall Museum of Transport in Pioneers Park, La Rochelle, Johannesburg popped up and it looked too good to miss. The journey then became a voyage of discovery.

After a short visit to the Reefsteamers depot it was a simple drive around the Jo'burg ring

road to the James Hall Museum which is a veritable Aladdin's Cave and turned out to be one of the biggest and most pleasant surprises of the trip. It was established by the late Jimmie Hall, a car enthusiast, in the City of Johannesburg in February 1964, his son Peter continued the work until 2012 before retiring. The museum includes buses, trams, cars, lorries, fire engines, bicycles, motor cycles, traction engines and all forms of land



1933 Sentinel steam bus at the James Hall Museum.



Restored tram at James Hall.



London Transport RT 2634 is in driveable condition at James Hall.

transport imaginable even including three steam locos, it has the largest and most varied collection of vehicles in the country.

Many vehicles have been lovingly restored and are displayed securely in the exhibition halls, there is not a lot of room because they have too many vehicles. Quarts and pint pots comes to mind! The traction engines are under cover in a locked compound, which was kindly undone enabling access for photography.

The City of Johannesburg owns the museum buildings, maintains the grounds and pays for the staff. Restoration of the vehicles to working order is funded by the Friends of the Museum

who also pay for the road licences and insurance, boiler certificate for the Sentinel steam bus which is steamable and used occasionally on the streets of Johannesburg as is an RT London Bus, purchase of additional vehicles for the collection, the web site and its updating. Open days are held to raise the awareness of the museum when the vehicles are used to give rides to the public, all funded by donations as admission to the museum is free.

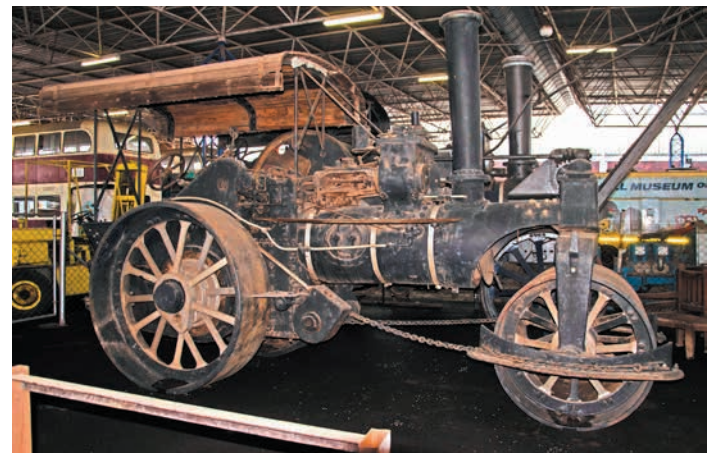
In the past people have written uncomplimentary and unfairly about the museum because not all exhibits have been

restored. We must understand it is all down to money and realise it is not so important that everything is pristine but that it has been preserved for posterity, clearly, they are doing their best with limited resources. SA does have a lottery but unlike the UK lottery money appears not to go to important museums like this one. Staff are dedicated, friendly and helpful.

Another problem they suffer from is theft, people have been caught taking badges and other items off the vehicles, this is totally unacceptable and shows little respect for the work that is being put in. »



1927 Super Sentinel tractor 'Texas Jack', with rare Garrett wagon (left).



Some steam vehicles are 'caged' but public access is allowed.



Fowler B7 'Lion' crane engine of 1939.



A rather orange Fowler ploughing engine outside the Big Hole Museum, Kimberley.



Local tramcar No 11 seems unloved at Big Hole...



...however these two appear in better health. The T Green of Leeds-built steam tram at the front replaced mule-operated trams on the section between Beaconsfield and Kimberley on July 15, 1900.



Well-presented portable engines inside their Sandstone shed.

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*The International Sandstone Festival must be one of the largest heritage transport events in the Southern Hemisphere if not the World*  
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Getting there is easy as the open top Johannesburg tourist bus stops outside but by car there is a distinct lack of signposts even when getting close, for a major museum this is not good. There is much of interest to keep you occupied for half a day at least.

Heading south next to Kimberley to see the steam railway locomotives preserved in the old steam shed and also to visit the ‘Big Hole’ Museum famous for diamonds. Displayed nearby two steam locos and a John Deere tractor is a Fowler of Leeds traction engine. One item looked very dangerous with exposed asbestos lagging, which was given a wide berth.

Sandstone is near Ficksburg in the Eastern Free State located under the Maluti Mountains along the Caledon River which is the border with land-locked Lesotho, it was bought by its present owners a British owned company in 1995. Sandstone Heritage Trust is a private preservation initiative established on a commercial arable farm growing wheat, maize and sunflowers covering 20,000 acres.

The collection is continually growing and extends to tractors, vintage buses, lorries, aircraft, traction engines many dating back to the early 20th century, cars, military vehicles including tanks and guns, ox wagons, earth moving machinery and stationary engines,



A bus waits for NG6 No 97 Jimmie to pass.



Portables and a McLaren on the plains at Sandstone.

a home is also offered to other collectors. It had been on my bucket list for a number of years and having looked with envy at the wonderful photographic opportunities on offer it became too much to resist. The International Sandstone Festival must be one of the largest heritage transport events in the Southern Hemisphere if not the World.

Local farmers had been preserving farming machinery and the previous owners were

still using older style vehicles rather than modernising, thus creating a historic time warp. With insight the new owners saw a wonderful opportunity to preserve these farming methods, machinery and the essential skills needed to maintain them which are still used daily. It is now essentially a modern working commercial farm, but historic machinery is used where possible. Under the leadership of Wilfred Mole who can be

described as 'a preservationist for all things heritage' Sandstone Heritage Trust has become a leader in preservation not just in South Africa but perhaps the world.

On the approach road, ploughing equipment is lined up alongside and when the trains are on the move vintage transport of all descriptions including traction engines follow on the parallel dirt roads, where else can you see this? ▶



Following the train on the cart road, with NGG16 No 153 (Hunslet Taylor 1968) and NGG16 No 88 (Cockerill 1936).

## SOUTH AFRICA

Everyone on the farm is very friendly and nothing is too much trouble, the complete site is conducive to photography with access to most storage areas, coupled with wonderful SA light and the added attraction of the Cosmos in full bloom along the sides of the fields. There is so much to see so listing all the preserved items is impossible here, instead go to their excellent website at [www.sandstone-estates.com/](http://www.sandstone-estates.com/) which is updated regularly, this will also give you information regarding opening days and future events.

It is hard to understand how difficult and complex the Sandstone event must have been to organise, with so much going on credit has to be given to all involved, especially Wilf Mole who allowed the event to take place, also Dave



McLaren traction engine No 767 of 1904 meets Sentinel S4 waggon No 9178 of 1934.





Vintage tractors of all descriptions are arranged for the benefit of photographers.

Richardson and the team at Sandstone who started work a year earlier to put the event together.

Summing up is adequately left to Sandstone themselves and quoted on their website, "Finally, by way of clarification we are not a museum; we are simply a private collection of Heritage items on a commercial farm and the staff do their best to keep everything in tip-top condition and to show visitors around as appropriate". What a wonderful statement and keep up the excellent work.

Should you decide to go Geoff's Trains is the international booking agent for the 'Stars of Sandstone' festival, the web site is [www.geoffs-trains.com/](http://www.geoffs-trains.com/)

Getting to South Africa is easy with regular direct flights taking 11 hours from the UK to Johannesburg though many have a stopover taking in excess of 15 hours. I chose a flight taking 11 hours with British Airways for ease then car hire at a very reasonable price through their web site for travelling south.

There is plenty of good accommodation available and good restaurants all at reasonable prices, driving is on the left, the roads are good and a British driving licence is valid. No visa is required for SA and immigration is quick and simple. ■



Fowler B5 crane locomotive of 1901.

BELOW: Garratt heaven as No 153 and No 113 take a passenger working past the crane engine.

