



Chairman's Report for the WLA AGM

11th November 2023

Good afternoon, everyone!

If last year was a "vintage year" for the WLA, then I think it's fair to say that this year has been a "remarkable year" for the WLA! A year ago, who would have thought that we would end up with three Westerns on our books; I am quite humbled to think that the WLA is held in such high regard by the owners of D1048 to receive the locomotive as a "gift" and in this respect I would like to thank the previous owners – Pete Simpson & Marc Koch for their generosity and I'm sure that you'll be pleased to hear that both Pete and Marc were granted life membership of the WLA.

I will cover a few more points regarding D1048 later and you may have seen that there is an item on our Agenda (Tony Willmore would like to say a few words) and of course, we'll do our best to answer any questions you may wish to raise.

Looking back at this year, it must be remembered that there was a huge amount of work carried out on D1062 over the winter not only to get her ready for the running season but also ready to celebrate the locomotive's 60th Birthday which was on 6th May, which, being a Saturday, was a good excuse to extend the celebrations into the following day. The locomotive ran with a very smart headboard, (thanks to Coop!) and for those who attended the weekend, it was great to have some decent mileage (160 miles to be precise) with three round trips on the Saturday and a further two on the Sunday. This was then followed by the SVR's Spring Diesel Festival from the 18th to 21st May, in which D1062 also played its part.

I should also mention that celebrating D1062's birthday was a very close-run thing as there was a considerable amount of work to make the locomotive serviceable, all carried out by Darren and just a handful of Working Members for which it's only right to recognise that, if it hadn't of been for the few dedicated individuals, the locomotive simply wouldn't have run!

Sometimes, things don't always go our own way and we do have setbacks from time to time and so it was with our NLHF application for D1013 Bogie Overhaul Appeal. In the opinion of the NLHF, "the combination of heritage importance, evidence of need and value for money would make it a low priority for lottery funding." Despite all the hard work by Pete Sandham and others, we had to accept that the application to fund a complete bogie overhaul to mainline standard (estimated at £756k) would have been much stronger if D1013 had been the only locomotive of its type remaining. In addition, there were several other requirements stipulated by the NLHF, which unfortunately, would not make the project practical or achievable.

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As with most setbacks, there's an upside. Thanks to Pete Sandham we have a fully detailed Technical Requirements document for a complete bogie overhaul, which I'm sure will be useful for many years, if not generations to come. Also, not only had we raised some £13k towards the bogie appeal but one of our newest members – Phil Hiscocks kindly donated a further £15k towards the project at the Spring Diesel Festival – quite remarkable really, thank you Phil!

Just to mention, the money raised for D1013's bogie overhaul should enable us to do all the work that we've done already to D1062's bogies, plus a bit more and by the way, the appeal for D1013 is still open if anyone would like to do some match funding - or contribute, no matter how large or small!

Whilst D1062 continued in service during the year, there was an issue with the Automatic Voltage Regulator (AVR) at "A" end which needed to be changed and this is where D1013 came to the rescue again, in lending one of hers! Although the issue didn't stop the loco from running, it would have become a failure if for whatever reason "B" end engine had failed. Anyway, the faulty AVR has now been repaired and we now have a spare one in stock too! And by the way, D1062 went on to achieve 100% availability for 2023, something we can all be proud of!

Turning to D1013, I would like to thank the team of people who looked after her during this year. A special mention to Marty who carried out quite a bit of body work with the filler – probably one of the muckiest jobs available! And then to Paul Brinsford who had the task of getting the bodyside fire-pull rings off to refurbish the fire-pull barrels which were in a dreadful state! And then there was all the bodyside rubbing down to do with a sander, which started off with what was to be just going to be the yellow ends, then the cab sides, then the body sides and then the roof as well! In the end, the whole locomotive was repainted but only just in the nick of time for the Autumn Diesel Bash.

I know that one or two members will say that it should have been painted maroon but this would have been a much bigger job and one that none of us were prepared to take on. So, we just did the best that we could do with the resources available but ending up with a complete loco repaint including all the external detailing work, ready for the Gala.

Now, there is a proposal on the table which we will get to later on in the meeting so you will have the opportunity to endorse what's been done and defer the decision to repaint D1013 into a different livery, after D1013's overhaul has been completed – it's up to you. All I would say is that it was great to see D1013 play its part at the Gala, alongside D1048 which had also been repainted. To have two freshly painted Thousands available was another great achievement!

So now I've mentioned D1048 again, it would right to say a few more words! The arrangements to acquire the locomotive and move it quite unexpectedly from the Midland Railway Centre was probably one of the best kept secrets of the year! A huge amount of planning and discussion had to take place behind the scenes, but it all started off with the owners' discussion about the possibility of gifting the locomotive to the WLA through our Treasurer, Mike Targett. The owners of D1048 took the view that the WLA was the best group to look after her. They basically wanted the locomotive to benefit the WLA in terms of spares or as a working locomotive, if at all possible. Our undertaking is that whatever the future holds for D1048 we will preserve the locomotive and keep it in one piece for future generations to enjoy.

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I should also mention that we are indebted to the Severn Valley Railway, for allowing the locomotive to stay for the time being, whilst the locomotive is assessed and obviously, they were very keen to have D1048 join in with all the celebrations, for what must have been the greatest diesel hydraulic event of all time!

Will D1048 ever run again? We don't know, is the honest answer! It's subject to an engineering assessment and whatever we can or can't do is subject to what we find out. And whatever happens, we are making it clear that our priority lies with D1062 remaining in traffic and finishing off the overhaul for D1013.

Another issue that the Membership needs to be aware of, is that we need to change the "Objects" within our Memorandum & Articles of Association to allow D1048 to be adopted alongside D1013 & D1062 as technically, the only thing we can do at the moment is acquire the locomotive as "spares". To make the changes, we will need to seek approval from the Charities Commission and then we need a resolution from the Members, probably at the next AGM. Ultimately, if D1048 is to ever run again it will be down to the engineers and the Working Members who are prepared to do the work, not to mention all the funding that we will need to raise, to make it happen!

For the short-term, D1048 will receive some preventative maintenance and for the immediate future, the locomotive is likely to be stored in the carriage shed to make room at Kidderminster TMD with four HST power cars visiting for four weeks. For the longer term, we're looking at the possibility (and this is only just a possibility!) of displaying the locomotive in the Engine House at Highley which, from our point of view would be ideal, whilst we focus on D1013's overhaul for the year ahead.

So, hopefully, you'll understand that whilst D1048 will not be back as a working locomotive any time soon, it has become an honour to be gifted this locomotive and whether it can be made to work or not, you can be assured that the WLA, as a Preservation Group will do its best to look after it, as best we can.

I've already touched on the Autumn Gala Festival, which I'm sure you'll agree, was one of the greatest Gala events of all time and one where the WLA played a key role with D1062 operational on each day, and with D1013 and D1048 looking magnificent on display at Kidderminster, both fresh from their repaints. The photo opportunities were unprecedented, and I doubt if we'll ever see the scenes with the other hydraulics for a very long time to come, if ever, in our lifetime. From a personal point of view, double heading on the last train back from Highley to Bridgnorth with D1015 on the front was just amazing; and with 5,400 bhp available, I don't think we've ever accelerated up Highley or Eardington bank so quickly! All I would say is that it was a sight to behold – once all the black smoke had cleared from D1015!

I'm sure you would like your thanks passed on to all those who helped to make this happen and especially to the Sales Team who took an astonishing £8k in merchandise and raffle ticket sales. An all-time record for sure!

Unfortunately, one of our stalwarts on the Sales Team – Chris Sheilds, couldn't attend and enjoy this event due to his fight with Motor Neurone Disease which had been affecting him for several months beforehand and he sadly died soon afterwards on the 14th October at the age of 64. I would like to pay tribute to all the help that Chris gave to the WLA, along with his help to many other preservation groups, including the DEPG. He will be missed by many friends and volunteers.

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After such a successful gala event, it was good to see some amazing PR for the both the SVR and WLA and a special thanks to Paul Finch who has helped keep the WLA in the limelight with the publicity. It's no coincidence that our membership numbers have started to see an increase and after remaining at around 300 for many years; we've now seen them grow by over 30% to just over 400, which is a remarkable achievement in its own right! So thank you to those of you who have joined or rejoined, including some of the old-school members, as it's great to see you back on board!

And from a finance perspective, it's great to report that our income was in excess of £80k which, after expenses of around £30k, produced a healthy profit of £50k! Compared to last year, that's a 45% increase in income and 80% increase in profit! Quite remarkable!

A cause for celebration without doubt.... but a word of caution! It's easy to be complacent – things could have been completely different this year, as it's a very fine line between Success and Failure. Had the small team of volunteers not managed to do the work to get D1062 ready for the season; the few people who worked on D1013 to make her presentable; the few people who worked to make sure D1048 could visit – we would be looking at an entirely different situation and a completely different set of figures!

Please remember that we can only rely on people's goodwill for so long, and so, if you can come along and support the few people who work on the locomotives, help out with sales, help out with recruiting new members, it will all help to guarantee our success for the future.

Just to summarise then, the WLA in 2023 has:

- Helped secure the future of D1048 Western Lady
- Seen D1062 perform with 100% availability record
- Seen D1013 looking as immaculate as any Western could
- Seen our income increase 45% on last year and profit up 80%
- Seen our membership grow by 30% to over 400 members

And all this with just a handful of dedicated volunteers.

If that isn't a remarkable achievement, then I don't know what is!

Thank you!

Roger Smith
Chairman