

Message from Graham Howell

First of all, may I offer my apologies for not being with you today on such an auspicious occasion. Although I shall be away from the UK my thoughts will be with you.

I cannot quite take it in that the WLA was formed 50 years ago. Little did we all think that our little group would achieve so much and it has now blossomed into a world renowned organisation with members scattered all over the world.

I recall very well attending a members get together in the British Railway Staff Association building at Bristol Temple Meads when it became very apparent to me that those present had an overwhelming desire to buy and preserve a class 52 locomotive but in all honesty did not have much idea how this was going to be achieved let alone to fully realise the complexities of such a purchase and upkeep. Dear old George Russum and his friends meant well but were well out of their depth.

I remember standing up and introduced myself and explained that I worked in the Swindon Works as a locomotive fitter and then went on to ask some pertinent questions and before I knew it I was voted onto the committee. Luckily it was not too long after that David Ashley came onto the scene who with his undoubted management skills guided us into the professional organisation which eventually guided us to run an incredibly successful main line railtour to from Kings Cross to York with D1023 and then more importantly led us through the successful contracts to purchase D1062, the setting up of a works order with Swindon Works for essential repairs and the eventual private railway working contracts, this was no mean task. Sadly David is no longer with us but he would be so proud I am absolutely sure.

The choice of D1062 for preservation was at the time considered by some to be wrong but there is no doubt that the choice was completely correct when weighed up alongside the dregs of the fleet that were still running. She was structurally sound, had never been in a serious collision and was in the right place being at Swindon Works and with certain people in the right position who I knew we were able to effect repairs and acquire a large quantity of essential spare parts.

It must also be recognised that the work and money that Richard Holdsworth put into the Association was significant even if at the time it was thought we may have bitten off too much taking on two locomotives following his purchase of D1013.

The placement of the locomotives at the Torbay & Dartmouth Railway was seen to be correct as this was typical class 52 territory although the storage facilities were lacking somewhat. After a short period it became clear that the T & D Railway was not a good place to be and thanks again to David Ashley and a management committee who recognised the shortcomings of the situation we managed to move the locomotives to the Severn Valley Railway. The early days here were not without many challenges but thanks again to certain members such as Ian Jackson and a small band of willing workers the best was made of the situation.

The years have slipped by and it was recognised that both locomotives required extensive repairs and I have to add my personal thanks to the present working members who without doubt have shown total professionalism and never ending strength and a willingness to get the job done to such high standards. The work you have taken on such as full rewiring of both locomotives is nothing short of miraculous, even down to the non-locomotive work such as a proper store where the precious spare parts can be held safely and dry. Most people have no idea what it takes to keep these machines running believe me this is not easy and often in far from ideal conditions, let alone the never ending draw on the Association funds.

Even now with the almost luxury of the diesel depot facilities at Kidderminster it must be recognised that it all comes down to leadership, enthusiasm and sheer guts and determination to get the job done. I take my hat off to you all and applaud you all for this work, I am sure all of those who are gathered here today will agree. Well done indeed one and all, you deserve every possible praise.

So, enjoy today in and around the surroundings of the former works where the Westerns were built, alongside Crewe works and of course where the fleet were overhauled. It is worth recalling that as some works guides would say when they took parties around the works that when they walked into the 'A' shop they were in the cathedral of railway workshops.

Sadly it was also the place where the fleet were disposed of but from the scrap piles you have brought the locomotives through it all and continue to maintain these two (sorry three) fine machines to such high standards. The men and women of the works would indeed be proud to see what you have achieved.

You can stand and throw your chests out and say yes, we are a good bunch dedicated to our task.

Do remember that the great bulk of the workforce in the works who would have built, and overhauled these unique locomotives have now past on to the great erecting shop in the sky.

You may also not realise it but the weighbridge where you will enjoy a raised glass or two and a meal later on today is the very building where Courier was worked on in 1976 and 1977 including the full repaint by works painters Terry Couling and Gary Stroud who did not charge us anything for their time which was considerable. It was Terry of course who painted and sign wrote the headboard for the Western Talisman railtour. Terry died some years ago but he would be smiling now.

I can still vividly recall the Saturday morning when we had pre heated the coolant and I had arranged for the Erecting Shop inspector Alfie Neate to come along and check a few things before we started the engines at a future date. I recall he said well 'it's a shame to waste all that hot coolant, let's have a run up' ! All went well and the rest is now history. There were quite a few tears that day I can assure you.

So, my dear friends I ask you to carry on and continue to inspire the railway preservation world. You have achieved so much, you can stand proud and once again I salute you all.

Graham Howell