

FIFTY YEARS OF THE WESTERN LOCOMOTIVE ASSOCIATION

Welcome by Roger Smith

Fifty years! We might reach fifty years in age if we're lucky, we might have a job for fifty years if we're luckier, or if you're really, really lucky, you might be married for fifty years! Fifty years is half a Century, the best part of a lifetime and so it's not often we can celebrate such a major achievement, such a significant milestone.

Certainly, it's a time for reflection, a time of transition, as we move on to new challenges and opportunities. And, as we meet here today, it's a time for Humour, Nostalgia and Emotion.

Many of you will know that the WLA was formally launched in Bristol, in January 1974, although the founder members had gathered around in 1973 to discuss the possibility of saving a Class 52, just as the first withdrawals were taking place in May 1973. With national press advertising, the WLA membership grew exponentially way beyond membership just based in and around the Bristol area.

Looking back, it's quite remarkable that the WLA successfully purchased D1062 Western Courier, just a couple of years later in October 1976, restored to full working condition in maroon with half yellow ends by May 1977, here at Swindon in the Weighbridge building (where many of us are having dinner tonight), just a few months after the end of Westerns on BR.

Looking back, I think it shows just how forward thinking those founder members were to set up one of the first diesel preservation groups in the country. And what with the operational responsibility for D1013 Western Ranger, who would have thought that since those days, we have been able to see and hear a working Western EVERY SINGLE YEAR, a total of 47 years!

From a personal point of view, it's a great honour to be the Chairman in our 50th year and a privilege to be with so many of you who have helped our cause with the preservation and operation of D1013 and D1062. And now, as we head into the future, we have the responsibility for the preservation of D1048 Western Lady.

I'm sure we'll all enjoy this event with much Humour, Nostalgia and Emotion and my thanks to everyone who has made the effort to attend and to our guests with their presentations. Who knows what the next half century will bring with all the challenges and opportunities, but you can be assured, we'll do our very best to make it another Whizzo one!

Thank you!

Roger Smith

Chairman