

## **HARDY TOUR FORMS CENTREPIECE OF DORCHESTER BUS RALLY**

Sunday 13th August 2017 – 10am-4pm – Dorchester, Top o' Town car park – 3rd annual running day – West Country Historic Omnibus and Transport Trust (WHOTT).

A tour of sites associated with Thomas Hardy's book *The Woodlanders* formed a major attraction at this year's Dorchester bus rally. The rally organisers the West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust (WHOTT) joined with the Hardy Society to celebrate 130 years of the book's publication by running a coach tour through Melbury Park by kind permission of the Hon Mrs Charlotte Townshend. The tour was facilitated by Hardy Society chairman Mrs Helen Lange and vice-president Dr Tony Fincham and was so popular that an extra coach had to be provided.

Thirty buses operated 75 departures on 15 routes from Top O' Town between 09.20 and 17.30. In addition, early morning feeder buses brought enthusiasts and the public in from adjacent towns. Previous years' routes were expanded to include a regular service to and from Weymouth for those who wanted to visit the beach and shops. All services were free. In addition to the buses, there was a display of classic cars and commercial vehicles including a 1935 Beardmore taxi once owned by Geoffrey Fox-Strangways of Melbury House.

Chairman Robert Crawley, said "We were pleased to welcome the deputy Mayor of Dorchester and many of its citizens, and were delighted to have the support of local bus operators Go-Ahead and Damory who displayed some of their more modern vehicles. Vintage buses travelled from as far afield as Coventry and the Isle of Wight bringing enthusiasts to be present at this unique event, and in perfect weather we carried nearly 3000 passenger journeys. Given the amount of positive feedback we received, we have already confirmed with the authorities and Hardy Society that we will return to the same site on the same Sunday next year."

A new book on the history of Southern & Western National bus depots was launched at the rally, compiled by Robert Crawley who was on hand to sign copies. WHOTT had its mobile museum bus on site showing an exhibition of local memorabilia, and a stand selling books, photographs and transport ephemera. A souvenir programme describing the routes operated and a summary of local transport history was on sale on the day and a very small number is still available from Robert Crawley for those who missed out on this collectable.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

WHOTT was formed in 1998 to establish a museum devoted to the history and development of public and commercial road transport in the West Country. It became a charitable trust in 2000 and now has eighteen vehicles in its care, covering the period from 1929 to 1998, including traditional half-cab single and double-deck buses, luxury coaches, minibuses and commercial vehicles. It also has a growing archive facility that can be visited by appointment.

Top o' Town car park is the site of the former Bere Regis & District headquarters, bus garage and main works.

WHOTT will return to Top o' Town for its fourth event on Sunday 12th August 2018.

Anyone who shares the aims of WHOTT is invited to become a member. Further details can be found on our website [www.busmuseum.org.uk](http://www.busmuseum.org.uk), facebook @WHOTTbusmuseum or from our chairman Robert Crawley, telephone 01395-567795