

RESTORED COACH LAUNCHES DORCHESTER BUS RALLY

Sunday 15th August 2021 – 10am-4pm – Dorchester, Top o' Town car park – 6th annual running day – West Country Historic Omnibus and Transport Trust (WHOTT).

A remarkable survivor which has not seen light of day since 1985 will be unveiled by the Mayor of Dorchester at midday on 15th August. The historic coach was delivered new to an Exeter company in 1938 and operated on the Isles of Scilly from 1952. It entered preservation in 1971 and passed to the West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust (WHOTT) in 2009 with whom it has been subject to a 12-year long restoration project. The restoration team will be on hand to guide visitors through its work.

The coach will be a static exhibit at Dorchester's annual vintage bus rally which will return on Sunday 15th August after having sadly been cancelled in 2020 in respect for the coronavirus. It is again being organised by WHOTT, based at the Top O' Town car park from 10am to 4pm. Vehicles from former National and Borough bus companies will be present, together with representatives from local bus companies and their successors, plus some historic local commercial vehicles. However, the timetable will be less formal this year, with free buses operating on a circular route around Dorchester and Poundbury. In addition, early morning feeder buses will bring enthusiasts and the public in from some adjacent towns.

For the fourth year running there will be a link with the Hardy Society. A free coach tour of sites associated with one of his books will depart at 2pm with an on-board running commentary given by a local Hardy expert. In previous years vehicles made special trips to Melbury House, an area featured in Hardy's novel *The Woodlanders*, and to Egdon Heath, features recalled in Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and associations with *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, as well as Hardy's home at Max Gate, and Clouds Hill the home of *Lawrence of Arabia*. In 2019 the Hardy trip followed the old route from Dorchester to Weymouth, looking at places connected with *The Trumpet Major* and other Hardy short stories. This idea will be repeated in 2021 focusing on *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Seats are limited so free tickets will be issued on a first come first served basis.

Chairman of WHOTT, Robert Crawley, said "This is WHOTT's sixth Dorchester running day but we are being cautious. We will comply with virus rules which pertain on the day and will require face masks to be worn inside vehicles and the marquee or in close proximity to other people. Nevertheless I am pleased to say that we have had a lot of support and enthusiasm from Dorchester Town Council, local operator Damory, and the Hardy Society which recognises the unique connection our services have with places featured in Hardy's novels".

A marquee will provide a covered area showing an exhibition of local memorabilia, and a stand selling books, photographs and transport ephemera. A souvenir programme describing a summary of local transport history will be on sale on the day. Hand sanitisers and waste bins will be provided at the bus boarding point and in the marquee.

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 fifteen vehicles in its care, covering the period from 1929 to 1994, including traditional halfcab single and double-deck buses, luxury coaches, minibuses and commercial vehicles. It also has a growing archive facility that can be visited by appointment.

From 2003 to 2014 the Trust organised an annual transport rally in Exeter but moved to Dorchester in 2015 and has grown every year since.

The Dorchester rally site has a café and toilets and is a ten minute walk from the two railway stations. Direct trains from London and Bristol.

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

Morning free bus services will run to Dorchester from some main centres. For routes and pickup times please see our facebook page or website or call Robert Crawley as below.

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, facebook @WHOTTbusmuseum or from our chairman Robert Crawley, telephone 01395-567795, mobile 07974-567756, or from the sales stand on the day.