

80TH ANNIVERSARY OF BLACK & WHITE COACHES – A WEST COUNTRY CELEBRATION 16 SEPTEMBER

2006 is the 80th anniversary of the formation of Black & White Coaches and the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Black & White coach station and depot in St Margaret's Road, Cheltenham. The coach station was also the central hub of the Associated Motorways express coach service network in which a number of the largest coach operators participated and used Cheltenham as the main interchange between services going all over the country. Cheltenham was famed for its mass departures of coaches, particularly at 2pm when scores of coaches could flood onto the streets one after another. These were coaches of all colours from the big operators like Royal Blue, Midland Red, Bristol Omnibus Co, Red & White and United Counties as well as Black & White and many small independants operating as duplicates.

To mark this auspicious anniversary, a run of ten preserved coaches, spanning from 1948 to 1982, has been organised from Cheltenham to Exeter where it will join the West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust's annual historic vehicle rally at the Devon County Showground at Westpoint. The run will follow the old route to Gloucester then A38 to Bristol, A370 to Weston-Super-Mare where there will be a short stop on the Sea Front and then back onto the A38 through Highbridge, Bridgwater, Taunton, Wellington, Cullompton and to Exeter Coach Station. The run is expected to take between 5 and 6 hours depending on traffic conditions which, of course, on the proposed route, will be much less congested than in the times before the M5 was constructed when a slow moving traffic jam covered the entire route. We are sure that the sight of these old coaches will bring back memories for many people living along the route or who would have used the coach to travel down west on holiday.

Further details from: Dr Colin J Billington, Chairman of The West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust (WHOTT)

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Further information

The Trust

The West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust (WHOTT) is a charitable company (Registered Charity No. 1079795, Company registered in England No. 3780463) established to preserve the history of commercial road transport for the education and enjoyment of future generations. WHOTT's ambitions are to build a permanent display hall with archive and restoration facilities at Westpoint near Exeter and has outline planning permission for this. Friends of the Trust receive newsletters with historic articles and the Royal Blue anniversary run from Cheltenham is one of a number of events held through the year. The annual rally takes place this year on Sunday 17th September at Westpoint, the Devon County Showground on the outskirts of Exeter, and has attracted a record entry. For further details see www.busmuseum.org.uk, in general, and the 'events' area, in particular. To become involved in WHOTT activities become a Friend of the Trust

for a minimum donation of £15 per year and receive our quarterly newsletter, WHOTT's News! which includes historic articles about West Country transport – see our website or send your donation to WHOTT, c/o Ledger Farm, Forest Green Road, Fifield, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 2NR.

Coaching History

Express coach services in the South and West of England, as we know them today, developed from the route network established by companies such as Black & White, Royal Blue, Midland Red and Red & White Coaches over the 100 years up to 1980. At that time more than 50 years since the formation of Black & White and the centenary year of Royal Blue, as well as being a tribute to this heritage, heralded the integration of the routes of many famous and long established names into today's national network of white coach uniformity.

But the memories of those colourful days live on and are brought to life by the sight of vintage coaches on the highways and byways of Britain, brought out in the summer by enthusiasts who authentically restore these vehicles to their former glory.