

HARDY TOUR FORMS CENTREPIECE OF DORCHESTER BUS RALLY

Sunday 12th August 2018 – 10am-4pm – Dorchester, Top o' Town car park – 4th annual running day – West Country Historic Omnibus and Transport Trust (WHOTT).

A tour of sites associated with Thomas Hardy's book *The Return of the Native* 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 140 years of the book's publication by running two coach tours to Egdon Heath and the former homes of Thomas Hardy and Lawrence of Arabia. The tours were narrated by local Hardy Society expert Mrs Susan Clarke.

Despite a wet day, a selection of historic and more modern buses and coaches operated over 70 departures on 10 routes from Top O' Town between 09.20 and 17.30. In addition, early morning feeder buses brought enthusiasts and the public in from surrounding towns. All services were free.

Chairman Robert Crawley, said "We were pleased to welcome the Mayor of Dorchester, Cllr David Taylor, who showed a great interest in the vehicles on display. Once again, we were delighted to have the support of local bus operators Go-Ahead and Damory who displayed one of their historic vehicles. Vintage buses travelled from as far afield as Coventry and Horsham carrying enthusiasts to be present at this unique event, and despite less than perfect weather we carried over 1000 passenger journeys. Given the amount of positive feedback we received, we have already confirmed that we will return to Dorchester on 11th August next year."

A new book *Where Did They Run*, compiled by WHOTT member Geoff Hobbs, detailing the locations where vehicles in the Western National group of companies operated, was launched at the rally, and the Panther exhibition bus served as a sheltered selling point for books new and second-hand, photographs and other transport ephemera. The interior of the Panther also provided a great opportunity to sign up new members and several more who registered a keen interest. A souvenir programme describing the routes operated and a summary of local transport history was on sale on the day. A copy of this is still available from our website where WHOTT's new book can also be obtained.

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 sixteen 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 Dorchester for its fifth event on Sunday 11th August 2019.

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."