

MAYOR LAUNCHES REVIVED 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).

Dorchester's annual vintage bus rally returned on Sunday 15th August after having sadly been cancelled in 2020 in respect for the coronavirus. It was again organised by WHOTT, based at the Top O' Town car park. Vehicles from former national and local bus companies were present, plus some historic local commercial vehicles. However, the timetable was less formal this year, with free buses operating on a circular route around Dorchester and Poundbury. In addition, early morning feeder buses brought enthusiasts and the public in from some adjacent towns.

A historic coach collected the Mayor, Cllr Gareth Jones and the Mayoress from the Victory Day service in Borough Gardens at midday and conveyed them to the event. The Mayor took a great interest in the exhibits and spent several hours talking to their owners about the finer points of mechanical engineering. He was given a tour of the town in a red London double-decker and waved off the coach tour of Hardy sites.

For the fourth year running there was a link with the Hardy Society. A free coach tour of sites associated with Tess of the D'Urbervilles, with an on-board running commentary given by a local Hardy expert, took enthusiasts via the green valley of the River Frome to Bovington and Bere Regis, returning via Tolpuddle, Athelhampton and Puddletown.

Chairman of WHOTT, Robert Crawley, said "This is WHOTT's sixth Dorchester running day but we were cautious to comply with virus rules. Nevertheless I am pleased to say that we had a lot of support and enthusiasm from Dorchester Town Council, local operator Damory, and the Hardy Society which recognises the unique connection our bus services have with places featured in Hardy's novels. Special thanks go to WHOTT members Mark Withers and Peter Cousens and their buses for conveying the Mayor to and from the site. We also launched an appeal for funds to reupholster one of our coaches and our restoration team was on hand to guide visitors through its work."

A marquee provided 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 was on sale on the day. Hand sanitisers and waste bins were 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 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 seventh event on Sunday 14th August 2022, and has also been asked to join the Victorian Fair on 5th June.

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.