

# **WESTCOUNTRY HISTORIC OMNIBUS & TRANSPORT TRUST**

## **Chairman's Annual Report**

**May 2024**

### **MEMBERSHIP**

The membership of WHOTT, like similar organisations, comprises many of a certain age -ie over 65. It is becoming very apparent that the interest we represent is not attracting the same individual as it would have done fifty years ago. Today there are so many other things readily available in the palm of your hand that to motivate people to do something practical or mentally stimulating is becoming increasingly difficult. This is one of the biggest challenges we have to face and is vital if organisations like WHOTT is to survive. There was a time when we had over 200 members but this has dwindled, either through old age, death, or lack of interest to little over one hundred. Latest figures show we have 106 members, not including complimentary ones, of which five were new to us in the last twelve months. We haven't had all renewals in for 2024 so it is difficult to say how many may have lapsed. Each year some drop out for one reason or another, ten doing so in 2023 and fifteen in 2021, but new members come in at a lower rate. I have spoken other societies, not ones involved with transport, and they too are noticing the same trend. Only one I spoke to, a sports club, had actually got a waiting list for new members because they had no more facilities to accommodate them. How nice it would be in that position, people knocking on your door to join WHOTT. There must a secret formula to arrest this situation and get youngsters involved. I know they have school commitments but when I was their age I made time for extra activities outside school hours. I think it may be worth discussing this with experts who monitor these things to find out how we can entice the younger generation to get involved. Education is a key element of our charitable status and spreading our knowledge and practical skills to a wider audience has to be seriously considered. Then we have to retain them.

### **INCOME**

The accounts presented today will show how much income we have received and how Gift Aid significantly helps. We need to at least double our income to meet rising costs. There are some grants available but these are mainly for designated projects and there's a lot of competition trying to win this kind of money. Grants cannot be obtained to pay for rent, rates and insurance so we have to raise more income to cover these costs. The irony is that without having the facilities in the first place it is difficult to contemplate a project. While we have no shortage of project ideas, we cannot undertake them with poor or expensive accommodation round our necks. These are the ugly truths

we constantly face. A nice legacy every so often would be a welcome boost and although we often do get material objects left to us, money would also be appreciated.

## **ARCHIVE**

The archive facility at Coldharbour is convenient in some respects and is a safe haven for our collection but it is very cramped indeed. Moving there from Plymouth eight years ago was like trying to put a quart into a pint pot, but by storing display cabinets off site, we have just about managed. However, apart from the space restrictions I am proud with the way we handle and record items and hope before long we can offer more to the public through an online catalogue system which would then immediately open up our collection to a world-wide audience as well as closer to home. The archive has the potential to earn us more money through academic research but all this takes time and effort. Try doing this and also be bogged down with general administration at the same time.

## **WEBSITE**

It has been clearly pointed out to us that our website, whilst basically attractive and easy to navigate, lacks regular updates. Facebook has ceased visitors away but can only be regarded as an unofficial source though instantaneous. We need to improve the website, make it even more eye-catching, dispense with the unnecessaries and keep it updated at least once a week. This is one of our priorities.

## **EVENTS**

For several years we had enjoyable running days at Dorchester, using the Council's Top o' Town car park which also had a cafe and toilets on site. The cost of using this on a Sunday was quite minimal but all good things come to an end. A change in council administration, with Dorset becoming a unitary authority, saw prices escalating. For some of time we worked with the Hardy Society to spread the word and carry more free passengers to places of local interest. This worked reasonably well though could have been better. Covid then came and the event missed a year and the year didn't pick up so well. However, it had been our main event and our sales stand always did well. The Trustees decided Dorchester had probably run its course and decided to try something else where at least we could have our sales outlet. This year we are working with the Helicopter Museum at Weston-super-Mare who have kindly offered us good facilities in return for us running a free bus shuttle from the sea front to the site via the railway station. The day coincides with World Helicopter Day and is expected to attract a lot of visitors in mid August.

Apart from that our vehicles haven't been out and about much in the last twelve months apart from two private party trips and taking members to our January Social at Oake Manor Golf Club near Taunton.

## **VEHICLE ACCOMMODATION**

It would be foolish of me to say that the year under review has been an easy one. Our biggest challenge has been the vehicle accommodation at Knowstone. As you will know, we have been there since 2007 when our friendly landlords lived on site and having sheds to accommodate buses was more of a hobby than a business venture for them. Our rent all along has been £50 per vehicle per month, no matter which shed the vehicle was in. This very loose arrangement, without any tenancy agreement was all very well but we always knew we could be kicked out with little notice. The sheds being of varying heights dictated which buses were kept in each shed, though some could be moved from shed to shed for ease of working.

Eventually Malcolm, our landlord, died and a few years later his widow, Mary also. The site then became the property of their son Gary in Wiltshire who after a while decided he no longer wanted it. Manor Farm was advertised by Greenslade Taylor Hunt and several potential buyers were shown round. After a few months James Hayes viewed the place and decided to relocate his business there from South Molton. This meant he wanted some of the sheds for his own use and the sale went through in a matter of weeks. His family have also moved into the bungalow that Malcolm and Mary once lived in. James Hayes met us and other tenants, including the Devon General group who occupy Shed 1. We were using Sheds 2, 3 and 5 but had to cram everything into two sheds rather than three. This made it virtually impossible to work on our vehicles, especially in Shed 3 where one had to walk sideways between the vehicles. Meanwhile James Hayes began to move a lot of his equipment to these premises and making substantial improvements. It is obvious he is a businessman with a plan ahead and has made no secret of the fact that some buildings will be demolished and an avenue of storage containers placed along one edge. His attitude towards us has changed now that he is feeling his feet. Not surprisingly he has indicated we must enter into a lease, but afterwards this changed to a residential tenancy, a draft of which was circulated to us for approval. The basis of this is that DG rent one shed and WHOTT rents two. The shipping containers outside, which have been used for spare parts, would be charged separately at £80pcm. The rent on the sheds would increase in steps to coincide with improvements but all this adds up to us having to pay twice as much as we currently do. We have already emptied out the container and re-erected the shelving all down one side of Shed 3. Interestingly other tenants on the site have all left and gone elsewhere. It is our opinion that James Hayes won't want us there after the three-year tenancy is up. In the

meantime we envisage our stay to be inconvenienced by his own business activities.

In order to overcome the immediate storage problems, two vehicles (one DG and one WHOTT) have been moved to Sherborne and another which WHOTT looked after for a friend, has also gone to Dorset. While this has eased the parking problem, it means that rent is now being paid at more than one place.

Another problem that has been overhanging Manor Farm is rates. The Valuation Office class the sheds as 'Warehouses' which definition means a place where merchandise is stored for distribution. These sheds have been totally unsuitable for that purpose so we have been trying to challenge that. However, now that James Hayes is using his similar adjoining sheds for commercial activity, they will have to be classed as warehouses anyway. This will make it even more difficult for us to challenge and when this was put to James he simply said 'rates are the concern of the tenant, not the landlord' which, of course, is perfectly true. He was quite unsympathetic when saying this.

Draft rental agreements have been sent to both DG and ourselves and we have shared the information between us before submitting our comments. The intention is for them to commence on 1<sup>st</sup> June and by doing so they have given us 14 clear days in which to seek legal advice. A plan referred to was not included so has been requested for the solicitor to inspect. The DG and ourselves will share legal costs. We are rather suspicious about the terms of the agreement anyway because they do not seem to be tailored to the premises, but simply a template pulled off the internet. It is this sort of thing that we have been preoccupied with instead of getting on with the things that interest us most.

The hard fact remains that storing our vehicles is going to cost a lot more, even if we had to relocate, but the choice is limited and the funds unsustainable unless we attract more financial support. The Trustees are very conscious of this and it is more and more occupying their time.

I am afraid all this sounds rather gloomy but you need to know the true situation. The Trustees are extremely grateful for the support members have given us thus far and hope we can see a way through this.

Robert Crawley

Chairman

4<sup>th</sup> May 2024



# The West Country Historic Omnibus and Transport Trust

## Income & expenditure account for the year ending 31 January 2024

Year to 31 January 2023		Year to 31 January 2024
£	<b>Income from generated funds</b>	£
7,001	Donations from members, friends and trustees	6,453
1,992	Gift Aid Recovery	1,356
2,603	Events, photo and booksales	2,014
38,715	Sundry Income - Legacies	9,644
400	Sundry Income - Archive & Sale of scrap	696
6,757	Donations - Seat & Tyre Appeals	155
<u>57,468</u>		<u>20,318</u>
-7,406	Less: Transfer to Reserves	-155
<u>50,062</u>		<u>20,163</u>
	<b>Expenditure</b>	
1,243	WHOTTs News & Support	1,262
764	Event Costs	254
1,500	Vehicle and fuel expenses	2,334
2,619	Seat & Tyre Appeals	3,993
5,644	Storage Expenses	5,558
2,514	Insurance	2,197
0	Office Expenses	67
99	Internet, website, advertising and publicity	107
545	Books, Publications & Photos	372
0	Repairs and maintenance	0
10,082	Archive - Rent, Rates & Expenses	9,238
145	Donations and subscriptions	96
67	Sundry and meeting expenses	198
<u>25,222</u>		<u>25,676</u>
-2,619	Less: Transfer from Reserves	-3,993
<u>22,603</u>		<u>21,683</u>
27,459	<b>Net movement in funds</b>	-1,520
0	Book Value of Surplus Vehicles sold	0
-28	Depreciation	-22
<u>102,110</u>	Balance brought forward	<u>129,541</u>
<u>129,541</u>	Balance carried forward	<u>127,999</u>
<b>2023</b>	<b>Balance Sheet as at 31 January 2024</b>	<b>2024</b>
£		£
	<b>Fixed Assets</b>	
73,240	Motor Vehicles (Valuation)	73,240
37,000	Archive (Valuation)	37,000
110	Fixtures & Fittings (wdv)	88
<u>110,350</u>		<u>110,328</u>
	<b>Current Assets</b>	
29,421	Bank Account (Nat West)	24,733
0	Prepayments	0
3,458	Debtors	2,613
4,500	Stock of Books	4,500
<u>37,379</u>		<u>31,846</u>
	<b>Current Liabilities</b>	
5,837	Loans from Trustees & Members	5,837
3,301	Creditors	3,126
9,050	Reserve (Specific Donations)	5,212
<u>18,188</u>		<u>14,175</u>
19,191	Net Current Assets	17,671
<u>129,541</u>	Unrestricted Funds	<u>127,999</u>

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