

AROUND DORSET

You are in: [Dorset](#) > [Features](#) > [Around Dorset](#) > Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival



Billy Bragg

Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival

A record 10,000 people attended this year's Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival which commemorates the six farm labourers who were transported to Australia for forming a trade union.

SEE ALSO

[Alistair Chisholm tells the Martrys' Story](#)

Audio and Video links on this page require Realplayer

[Around Dorset Features](#)

[On this site Tolpuddle 360 panorama](#)

[On bbc.co.uk The Politics Show](#)

[On the rest of the web Martyrs' Festival Tolpuddle Martyrs' Museum Tolpuddle Festival](#)

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external websites

Radio 1 Mini Guides

onlife

Rate your part of the country and see where you could visit.

[Radio 1 Mini Guides](#)

Panoramas



[Spin around Dorset](#)

[Hive Beach](#)
[Durdle Door](#)
[Gold Hill](#)

Despite falling trade union membership and labour history not being the most fashionable of subjects, for thousands of trade unionists from around the world, the Tolpuddle festival is an essential date in the diary.

Billy Bragg, Tony Benn and Hank Wangford topped the bill as members of ASLEF, CWU, the Pensioners Convention and Columbian Agricultural Union, Fensuagro, were amongst those who converged on the normally quiet Dorset village for a day of celebration, contemplation and political debate.

Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival in pictures >

🔊 Alistair Chisholm tells the martyrs' story >

Audio and Video links on this page require Realplayer

BBC South's Peter Henley - TU power in the South >

Former Labour MP and veteran campaigner, Tony Benn, gave a rousing speech and told BBC Dorset that the martyrs' festival continues to be an essential event:



Tony Benn

"The Tolpuddle Martyrs laid the first founding stones for democracy. They have taught us that progress has to be made by ourselves. If you look at the world today there are world movements trying to solve issues like the thousands of children who are dying. People are much better informed today."

Other speakers included Brendan Barber, TUC General Secretary, Aidee Moreno from Columbia and Maung Maung, General Secretary of Burma's TUC.

There was also a diverse range of music with something for everyone including the Oyster Band and Asere from Cuba.

Eleanor McEvoy played the main stage after hot-footing it over from The Larmer Tree Festival. Her album *A Woman's Heart*, is the best selling Irish album of all time. The title track, *Only A Woman's Heart*, received a rapturous round of applause.



Aidee Moreno from Columbia

Headliner Billy Bragg sang his trademark songs of protest to the huge assembled crowd. The crowd went wild when he played the anthemic *There Is Power In A Union*.

The most eagerly anticipated and moving event of the festival was the Grand Procession. Literally hundreds of people took to the streets of Tolpuddle holding colourful banners pledging allegiance for every union imaginable.



People had come from Wales, London and Yorkshire to join in. There was even a banner urging people to consider trade unions in Iraq. The march was lead by the Musician's Union Great Western jazz band.

The annual Martyrs' Festival remembers the



plight of six farm labourers from the village who were arrested on a charge of taking part in an 'illegal oath' ceremony.

Eleanor McEvoy

On February 24th 1834, in the eyes of their masters, they had dared to form a trade union to defend their livelihood.

At Dorchester's court house they were sentenced to seven years' transportation to the penal colonies of New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land in Australia.

The sentences provoked a national outcry, eventually leading to the granting of free pardons and their return to England. The event marked a historic episode in the struggle for trade unionists' rights in Great Britain.



The Grand Procession

If you're interested in finding out more about the martyrs then the Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum in the village is open everyday, excluding Monday's and entry is free. The court and cells where the martyrs were sentenced and held are now open in Dorchester throughout the summer. Guided tours are available at £2 for adults (children are free).

last updated: 25/07/05

SEE ALSO

[Tolpuddle 360 panorama](#)
[Around Dorset](#)
[Features](#)

You are in: [Dorset](#) > [Features](#) > [Around Dorset](#) > Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival



HOMEEMAILPRINT



TOP

SITE CONTENTS

BBC Dorset, Portfolio House, Princes Street, Dorchester, DT1 1TP
 phone: 023 8063 1311 | e-mail: dorset@bbc.co.uk

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy & Cookies Policy](#)