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Billy's new beach mark

HE MAY have made an indelible mark on the conscience of British music, but politically-inspired singer Billy Bragg wants no indelible oil marks on a beach near his home.

Billy, 49, lives on cliffs overlooking Burton Bradstock beach near Chesil Beach, Dorset, and has been involved in a hands-on clear up of oiled items washed up from MSC Napoli that now rests in Lyme Bay off Branscombe beach.

In an exclusive interview with the Herald, he said: "The Monday before last I woke up to find the beach covered in oiled confectionary, chocolate biscuits, Ferraro Rocher and heart-shaped packets of sweets, possibly Russian, that came in on the high tide.

"Sunday, January 21, was a very high tide and there was a strong smell of petrol and it was very badly soiled. After an assessment, West Dorset District Council and the National Trust sent emergency teams in.

"A lot of the oil you could pick up and put in bags. I was one of a few local people who volunteered to help and there must have been about 15 of us on the first day and we cleaned Burton Hive beach."

Billy spent Tuesday, Wednesday and part of Thursday last week helping to clean the beaches, including a two-and-a-half mile stretch west towards West Bay. "By then, there were about 50 of us, wearing plastic suits, getting on our knees. On Thursday two busloads of agricultural students arrived and what was a slow process then speeded up."

Billy, who has a book out called *The Progressive Patriot* - an eloquent and passionate response to the London bombings of July 7, 2005 - said he had not seen many oiled birds in the area where he lived "although I think more are towards Portland".

Just about to make a new album, he explained why he had helped out and why he helps with a local annual beach clean up. "One of the great things about a beach is it belongs to everyone and is free to go on, so it should be pristine for everyone when they come down.

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