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Singer Billy gives 10 guitars to prisoners in memory of music-mad Mark



Fitting memorial: Billy Bragg outside Northallerton prison with members of the family of the late Mark Ellis

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By David Walsh

BILLY Bragg joined the friends and family of a Barnsley man killed by carbon monoxide to deliver 10 memorial guitars to a jail.

The singer handed over the instruments to inmates in memory of Mark Ellis, a probation officer killed by a faulty boiler at his home on Hawthorne Crescent, Dodworth, in February.

The donation was made under the singer's Jail Guitar Doors campaign, an independent initiative to provide musical equipment for the rehabilitation of prisoners.

Close friend Ken Isherwood, of Abbeydale, Sheffield, said it was a fitting legacy for music-mad Mark, whose two sisters Joan Tye, of Staincross, and Anne Hirst, of Royston, and his ex-wife Helen and nephew were among those attending the handover at Northallerton jail in North Yorkshire.

He said: "We were led into the chapel where we met eight inmates and the governor and other officials.

"It was a moving day, especially when the inmates decided to play 'Everything I Do, I Do it for You', which brought a wry smile to us all because Mark hated the Bryan Adams song!

"Billy set up the charity after Joe Strummer died and how The Clash inspired him and playing guitar helped him through the bad times.

"He said the guitars were not a gift but a challenge and he urged the prisoners to learn to play. He also sang some songs from his new album.

"Mark's friend Richard Lynch spoke about Mark's passion for music and the punk ethic and giving people a second chance.

"It was very fitting, the ideal thing for Mark, and if it makes a difference in one person's life it will have been worthwhile.

"Billy Bragg was very charming and affable, and he's also got a lot of integrity and commitment - he drove up from Dorset for the visit."

The guitars were already marked up with rock stickers and slogans, such as 'This Guitar Kills Time', he added.

There was also enough money to pay for music books after family, friends and colleagues raised more than

£1,500 from collections at his funeral, donations, and a fundraising event at The Harlequin pub on Nursery Street in Sheffield.

Mark worked for more than 10 years in Sheffield Council's housing department before starting work for the probation service in Barnsley in 2001.

Log on to www.jailguitardoors.org.uk to make a donation.

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