



TOLPUDDLE OLD CHAPEL TRUST

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PROJECT INFORMATION - SAVING THE MARTYRS' LEGACY – JULY 2018

As I am sure you will be aware, in 1834 six agricultural labourers from Tolpuddle were tried and convicted at Dorchester Court for taking an illegal oath. Many people in England considered that a major miscarriage of justice had been perpetrated and following a national outcry against the trial and sentence, the six were pardoned and returned to the United Kingdom. One subsequently continued to live in Tolpuddle where he is buried while 5 emigrated to London, Ontario.

These events played a huge role in the subsequent creation of the trade union movement which of course is still celebrated today by the annual Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival.

What is not so well known is that in 1818, some of the Tolpuddle Martyrs assisted in building a Methodist Chapel in Tolpuddle where several attended to worship and it is believed at least one preached there.

From 1818 to 1834, the Martyrs and their families used this chapel to study the Bible and to worship. Biblical accounts of injustice brought home to them the reality of their own poor living and working conditions. This resulted in them joining the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. The story of their subsequent arrest, trial, transportation, pardon and final home coming is well known. The history and fate of their little chapel is less well known.

The Martyrs' Chapel became redundant in 1844 and was then used as a small barn and stable for the next 160 years, gradually falling into disrepair. The subsequent history of the building is sad, as the chapel ceased to be a religious building, following the construction of a newer Methodist church in Tolpuddle, and after being used as an agricultural barn and stable it was unused for many years.

The Old Chapel still exists, but the physical condition of the building, built largely in the vernacular style with local materials, is in a parlous state and is on Historic England's Buildings 'At Risk Register.'



The Old Chapel, because of its close connection with Trade Unionism and the Methodist Church, is felt by many to be of national importance because of its close links with both these bodies. This is acknowledged by many associated with both organisations. There is also strong local support for preserving the building.

The Saving the Martyrs' Legacy project was established in 2013 by members of the local community as a way of saving the 'at risk' former Methodist chapel. They formed a Building Preservation Trust, bought the building and set about raising funds to rescue it from Historic England's 'At Risk List' and restore it as a 'Quiet place in the heart of the village'

Because the building is listed as Grade II*, it is in the top 5% of our most important historic buildings in England. Tolpuddle Old Chapel Trust has petitioned hard on its behalf and has achieved a great deal, having received grant aid from Historic England, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Architectural Heritage Fund and from Local Authorities. It has consulted widely in the local community and with the TUC Museum in Tolpuddle.

An HLF Round 1 Heritage Grant application was submitted in May 2016 with a positive decision received in September and development funding of £63,700 was confirmed. An in-principle grant of £329,000 was awarded towards delivery costs of £693,000.

This funding allowed the Trust to produce detailed plans for the renovation and repair of the former chapel, as well as creating interpretation and community engagement activities to tell the history of the building and its connection to the Dorsetshire Labourers, who later became known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

The development of the Old Chapel will also help to enhance the visitor and tourist experience as part of the 'rural life' heritage corridor linking Dorchester with Hardy's Birthplace, Athelhampton House and Tolpuddle.

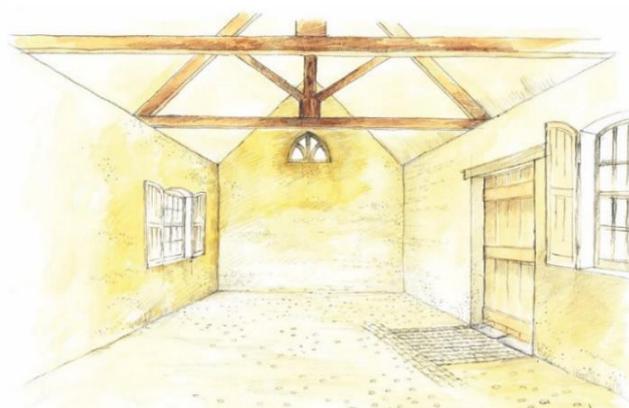
Planning permission has been granted to restore the Old Chapel and the Trust has received pledges of £143,000 towards the cost of this work and for the provision of ancillary services. The Trust now needs to raise **£221,000** in Match Funding in the hope of achieving an in-principle grant of £329,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Due to changes in the grant award process of the Heritage Lottery Fund, this is the **last chance** that the Trust has of saving this unique piece of our history related to the foundation of modern day trade unionism.

Artist Impressions of renovated Old Chapel and new extension



Artist impression from South by Adrian Whittlesea



Artist impression inside towards North by Adrian Whittlesea

£221,000 of partnership funding is still required to enable work onsite to commence in 2019.

The Trust needs to find this sum by the end of August 2018 and would be grateful for your support.

Please visit www.tolpuddleoldchapeltrust.org

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