

TOCT's local Member of Parliament, Oliver Letwin MP, writing in The Dorset Echo Thursday, 21 April, 2016

Article - restoration



A few days ago, I had the great delight of visiting a constituent who has a vision.

The constituent in question is a resident of Tolpuddle, and his vision is wholly benign. He and some other intrepid promoters are planning to restore a wonderful little chapel in Tolpuddle.

The chapel in question is intimately bound up with the story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, and it is also a notable piece of our architectural heritage – plain but elegant in its simplicity.

The plans, which are far advanced, have already benefited from a huge amount of professional expertise and sensitive architectural imagination – and you only have to enter the building, even in its present decrepit state, to get a sense of the history with which it is so connected. Once renovated, it will be both an adornment to a village that has many other adornments and also an additional draw for tourists who so often come to West Dorset, at least in part, because of our natural and human history.

What is so wonderful about this whole project, quite apart from the beautiful way in which it is being executed, is the fact that it has been conceived not by some great agency charged with such functions or by some commercial party hoping to turn an honest penny (not that there would be anything wrong with either of these) but by the voluntary efforts of people who have absolutely nothing to gain by it and whose enthusiasm for the cause derives exclusively from their concern to improve the place in which they live and to celebrate the links of that place with a part of our history that is of global significance.

But it is heart-warming to see such imagination and care being devoted to so noble an enterprise.

I hope that any reader of this column who shares my interest in Tolpuddle will pause when next visiting the village, inspect the building in its current state (opposite the very charming children's playground which opened there some years ago and was itself a tremendous communal enterprise) and I hope that, seeing it, they will share my admiration for the way in which it is now being resuscitated.