

*“Where the Spirit  
of the Lord is...  
there is freedom!”*

2 Corinthians, chapter 3 verse 17

*The story of the ‘Martyrs’  
of Tolpuddle in Dorset  
is one of courage and  
strength, shaped by faith.*



## What was the secret of their resilience?

The Tolpuddle Martyrs believed in the justice of their cause because they could see the oppression around them and knew it themselves. As Christians, they believed in the freedom and dignity of working men and women. As followers, they were fired up by the freedom that comes from believing in Jesus.

Their Bible study and preaching in the chapel taught them that willingness to suffer in a good cause (as Jesus did) is the true way of service and that, as John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said:

*‘The best of all is –  
God is with us’*



## What moved The Martyrs?



For more information about visiting the Tolpuddle Methodist Chapel, and links to Tolpuddle Old Chapel and the annual Tolpuddle Martyrs’ Festival, visit: [www.dsw.church](http://www.dsw.church)

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*The word 'martyr' means 'witness' – a person who is willing to stand up for something they believe in, even at the risk of personal suffering.*

*The Tolpuddle Martyrs show how Christian faith and social action can come together in a powerful way.*



## Where did their Christian conscience take the Tolpuddle Martyrs?

In the early nineteenth century, Acts of Parliament put downward pressure on the living conditions of the countryside poor. The Enclosures Acts took away their use of community common land for growing their own vegetables, as field hedges and walls were extended by local landowners who could then claim the land as their own. The Corn Laws, intended to protect the price of British grain in world trading, actually raised the cost of a loaf of bread at home... the basic food of the poor. Wages in Dorset were only nine shillings (45p) a week. In 1832, George Loveless – a dedicated farm worker and Methodist local preacher – worked with others to try to get the wages increased, but instead, they were lowered to six shillings (30p)!

The men of Tolpuddle were desperate. In 1833, they formed a Friendly Society of Agricultural Workers. Several of the six men who were to become the Tolpuddle Martyrs were Local (Lay) Preachers in the Methodist Church and were able to use their chapel experience in organising their movement and speaking in public. Their keen sense of social justice was drawn from their Bible study, as they caught the vision of personal equality and value as part of the 'kingdom of heaven'.

The union they formed was perfectly legal, but members had to swear a secret oath of loyalty and this proved to be their downfall. The local magistrates used laws intended to prevent mutiny in the Navy to catch them out. On 24 February 1834, the six leading men were arrested and marched to the gaol in Dorchester. At the Lent Assizes they were sentenced to seven years transportation to Australia for hard labour.

Five were sent to New South Wales, and George Loveless, who had become ill, was later taken to Van Dieman's Land (today's Tasmania).

When their story spread at home, pressure for their release built through big demonstrations. 'Pardon' was granted, but the 'martyrs' were not told and had to discover the news for themselves and arrange passages home. George Loveless, his brother James, Thomas and John Standfield, and James Brine returned to England in 1837, and James Hammett in 1839. The London–Dorchester Society that had fought for their return, had raised enough money to set them up with farms in Essex, but, as feeling against them began to grow there, five chose a new life in Canada and James Hammett returned to live and die in Dorset.

