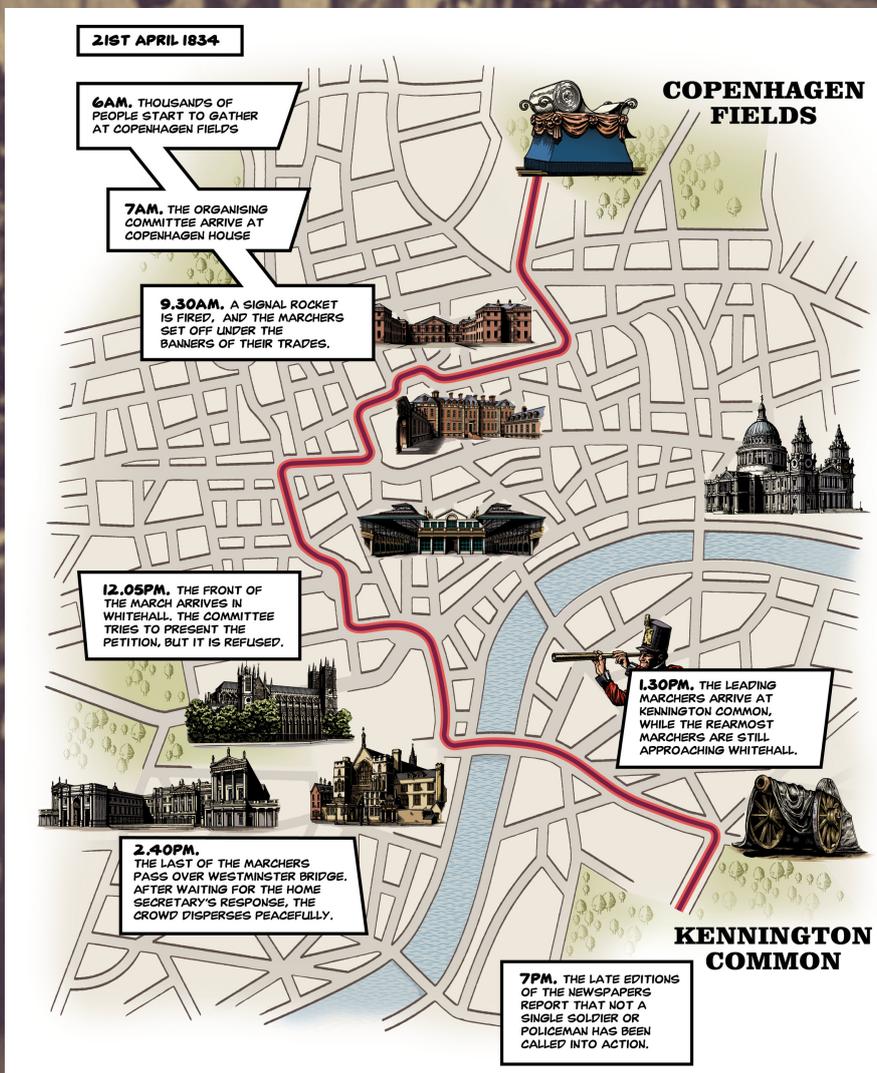


Tolpuddle Martyrs March

190th Anniversary

- In 1834, James Brine, James Hammett, George Loveless, James Loveless, Thomas Standfield and John Standfield were arrested for joining a trade union, agreeing that labourers should not work for less than 10 shillings a week (£53 in modern currency), a pay rise of 1 shilling (£5.30) per week.
- The six 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' were arrested on 24 February 1834 and charged with the 'administration of unlawful oaths'.
- They were tried at the Dorchester Assizes by Grand Jury in March 1834. The Grand Jury was composed of land owning gentlemen who opposed what they believed to be a treasonous threat to the power base and wealth of the landed upper classes.
- The six men were found guilty and sentenced to seven years penal servitude in Australia.
- The harsh treatment of the Tolpuddle Martyrs created widespread outcry throughout Britain. Trade unionists and supporters recognised this as an attack on the rights of workers to advocate for better working conditions.
- On 21 April 1834, Copenhagen Fields in London was flooded with up to 100,000 trade unionists, holding a petition to have the men released signed by 250,000 people.
- A grand procession with flying banners marched to Parliament in strict discipline. Loud cheers came from spectators lining the streets and crowding the roof tops. On arrival at Whitehall the petition was taken to the office of the Home Secretary, Lord Melbourne, who refused to accept it.
- The six men were already on the filthy, condemned ship set for New South Wales with 600 other people also sentenced to hard labour in the penal colonies.
- Transportation as a form of criminal punishment had emerged in the British legal system from the early 17th century as an alternative to execution. The intention behind transportation was to colonise foreign countries already inhabited by indigenous populations in order to expand the landmass and resources of the British Empire.

- Transportation was a brutal punishment aimed to exploit the labouring classes and those who wanted political reform. Few of those sent to the penal colonies ever returned either because they did not survive the ordeal, or because they could not afford the journey home following the end of their sentence.
- The Government tried to resist the mounting protest but the agitation for the men's release was maintained. Petitions came from all over the country with over 800,000 signatures.
- By June 1835, ten months after the Martyrs' arrival in penal colonies, conditional pardons had been granted by Lord John Russell, the Home Secretary.
- Russell had jumped the gun: legally, a convict could not be conditionally pardoned under four years. The flurry of correspondence between Whitehall and the Sydney and Hobart Government Houses caused confusion and delay.
- On 14th March 1836 the Government relinquished to public pressure and agreed that all the men should have a full and free pardon.
- The trade unions had won, and the six farm workers from Tolpuddle were on their way home as free men.



Left: Map of the route taken from Copenhagen Fields (Caledonian Park) to Parliament.

For more information go to:
www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk
www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk