# West Country sea shanty band investigated over modern slavery allegations following bus crash



A West Country sea shanty band, known as The Old Time Sailors, has recently found itself at the centre of a modern slavery investigation following a bus crash that occurred near Dartmoor. This incident, which involved six of the band members being arrested on suspicion of modern slavery offences, has raised significant concerns about the treatment of individuals within the band.

According to Devon and Cornwall Police, officers responded to the accident, which took place on Dolvin Road in Tavistock, at around 7.30 am on Monday, May 19. Initial investigations led to the identification of several individuals in the minibus who appeared to be potential victims of exploitation. Following this, a raid on a nearby caravan park uncovered further individuals who are now receiving care and protection from the authorities. Officer Tom Ottley stated, “As part of our response... we identified several of the occupants of the van as being potential victims of exploitation offences.” The police force is cooperating with local authority services and partner organisations to ensure proper support for these individuals.

The Old Time Sailors, who have garnered popularity for their lively performances at festivals, including Glastonbury, claim they are being falsely accused. They allege that recent events stem from an internal dispute, suggesting that they have been the targets of a calculated smear campaign. In a statement on Facebook, the band described themselves as a close-knit family that shares costs and experiences, vehemently denying any allegations of malpractice. They reflected on the emotional toll of these accusations, contending that they have never paid their musicians poorly and instead foster a communal atmosphere that celebrates music and performance.

However, the reported circumstances surrounding their operation contradict these claims. The Sun has alleged that some musicians associated with The Old Time Sailors were being housed in a farmhouse in East Devon, earning little to no pay. The investigation is ongoing, with the safety and welfare of identified victims placed at the forefront of police efforts.

This incident highlights a troubling reality beyond the immediate case of The Old Time Sailors. The historical context of sea shanties is fraught with connections to exploitation. Sea shanties, deeply rooted in maritime culture, are often sung to coordinate labour among sailors, and their origins can be traced back to African American work songs. This cultural exchange is significant as it underscores the complex relationship between music and power dynamics across history. While the songs have evolved into popular expressions of maritime life, their links to forced labour and the transatlantic slave trade remind us of the darker sides of tradition.

Modern-day slavery, especially within industries such as fishing, continues to be a pressing global issue. Reports indicate that exploitation exists not only inland but also in remote maritime sectors, where workers often face unbearable conditions and lack of rights. Such exploitative practices echo historical narratives associated with sea shanties and the painful legacy of forced labour that lingers even today.

As The Old Time Sailors prepare for future performances, including upcoming gigs at Camp Bestival and other venues, the band’s ability to move past this storm hinges on the outcomes of the ongoing investigation and public perception. As they continue to maintain their innocence, they emphasise their commitment to music and community, hoping to diffuse what they term an “online hate campaign” against them.

This situation underscores the importance of examining the implications of cultural traditions in the maritime realm, managing the delicate intersections of art, labour, and ethical considerations associated with performance and exploitation. The story of The Old Time Sailors serves as a beacon for broader conversations about contemporary issues of labour rights and the preservation of cultural heritages.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14742813/Sea-shanty-band-caught-slavery-probe-six-members-arrested.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.theoutlawocean.com/reporting/slavery-is-not-gone-it-has-just-moved-out-to-sea/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14742813/Sea-shanty-band-caught-slavery-probe-six-members-arrested.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.bethroars.com/singing-blog-tips/the-dark-side-of-sea-shanties)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-society-for-american-music/article/remembering-the-cotton-screwmen-interracial-waterfront-labor-and-the-development-of-sailors-chanties/B69ED89AB12C637C851440222512DE39), [[6]](https://avidbards.com/2021/02/05/the-black-history-of-sea-shanties/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389044189_WHAT_SHALL_WE_DO_WITH_THE_DRUNKEN_SAILOR_SEA_SHANTIES_THROUGH_THE_GENERATIONS), [[7]](https://www.qaronline.org/blog/2021/08/20/did-you-know-sea-shanties-were-important-part-sailing)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14742813/Sea-shanty-band-caught-slavery-probe-six-members-arrested.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://avidbards.com/2021/02/05/the-black-history-of-sea-shanties/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14742813/Sea-shanty-band-caught-slavery-probe-six-members-arrested.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.bethroars.com/singing-blog-tips/the-dark-side-of-sea-shanties)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14742813/Sea-shanty-band-caught-slavery-probe-six-members-arrested.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-society-for-american-music/article/remembering-the-cotton-screwmen-interracial-waterfront-labor-and-the-development-of-sailors-chanties/B69ED89AB12C637C851440222512DE39> - This scholarly article examines the origins of sea shanties, highlighting their development from African American work songs. It discusses how these songs, rooted in Black communities, were adopted by predominantly white sailors, emphasizing the cultural exchange and influence that shaped the maritime musical tradition.
3. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389044189_WHAT_SHALL_WE_DO_WITH_THE_DRUNKEN_SAILOR_SEA_SHANTIES_THROUGH_THE_GENERATIONS> - This research paper explores the evolution of sea shanties, focusing on their historical context and transformation over time. It delves into the cultural significance of songs like 'The Drunken Sailor,' analyzing their role in maritime labor and their adaptation across different generations.
4. <https://www.bethroars.com/singing-blog-tips/the-dark-side-of-sea-shanties> - This article delves into the lesser-known aspects of sea shanties, exploring their origins and the darker historical contexts associated with them. It discusses how these songs were influenced by African American work songs and their connection to the transatlantic slave trade.
5. <https://www.theoutlawocean.com/reporting/slavery-is-not-gone-it-has-just-moved-out-to-sea/> - This investigative report sheds light on modern-day slavery within the fishing industry, particularly in the South China Sea. It highlights the exploitation of migrant workers and the brutal conditions they endure, drawing parallels to historical instances of forced labor at sea.
6. <https://avidbards.com/2021/02/05/the-black-history-of-sea-shanties/> - This blog post explores the Black origins of sea shanties, tracing their development from African American work songs. It examines how these songs were integrated into maritime culture and their enduring influence on the genre.
7. <https://www.qaronline.org/blog/2021/08/20/did-you-know-sea-shanties-were-important-part-sailing> - This article discusses the significance of sea shanties in maritime history, detailing their role in coordinating labor and maintaining morale among sailors. It also touches upon the cultural exchange between African American work songs and European maritime traditions.