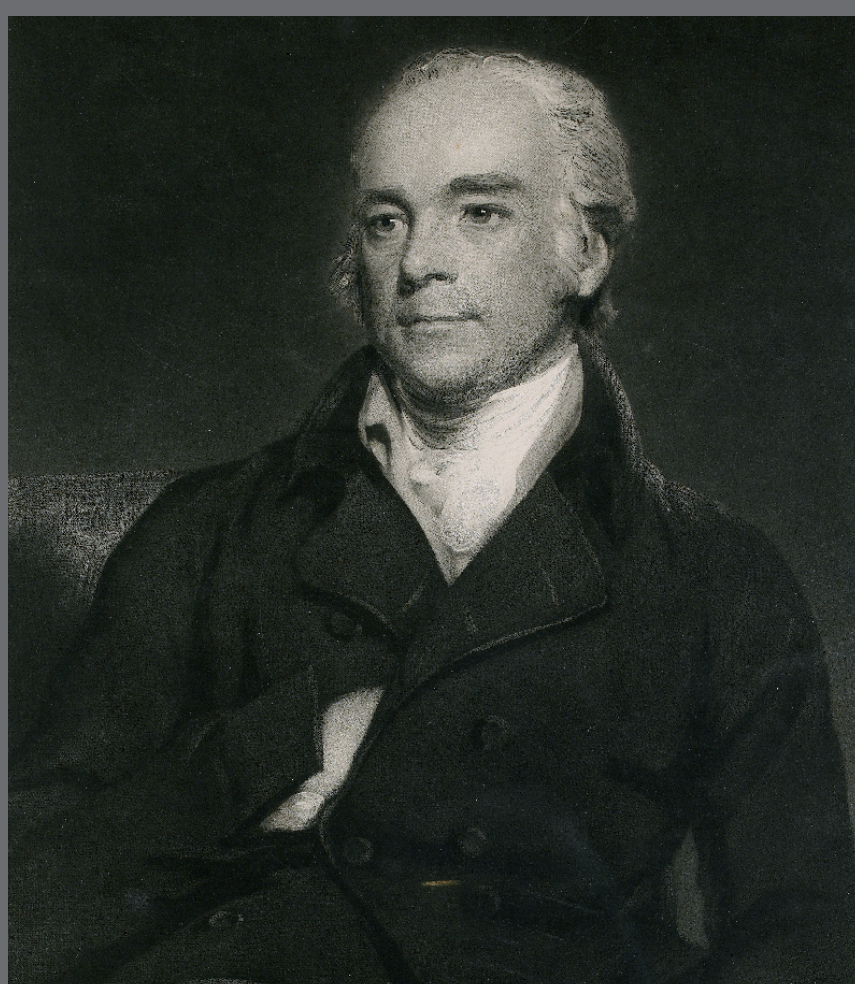


# ABOLITION

## Thomas Babington of Rothley Temple



Thomas Babington, a mezzotint print by Charles E Wagstaff, after John Hoppner, reproduced by kind permission of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. William Wilberforce said he had never met a man who 'exhibited the Christian character so fully and so uniformly' as Babington.

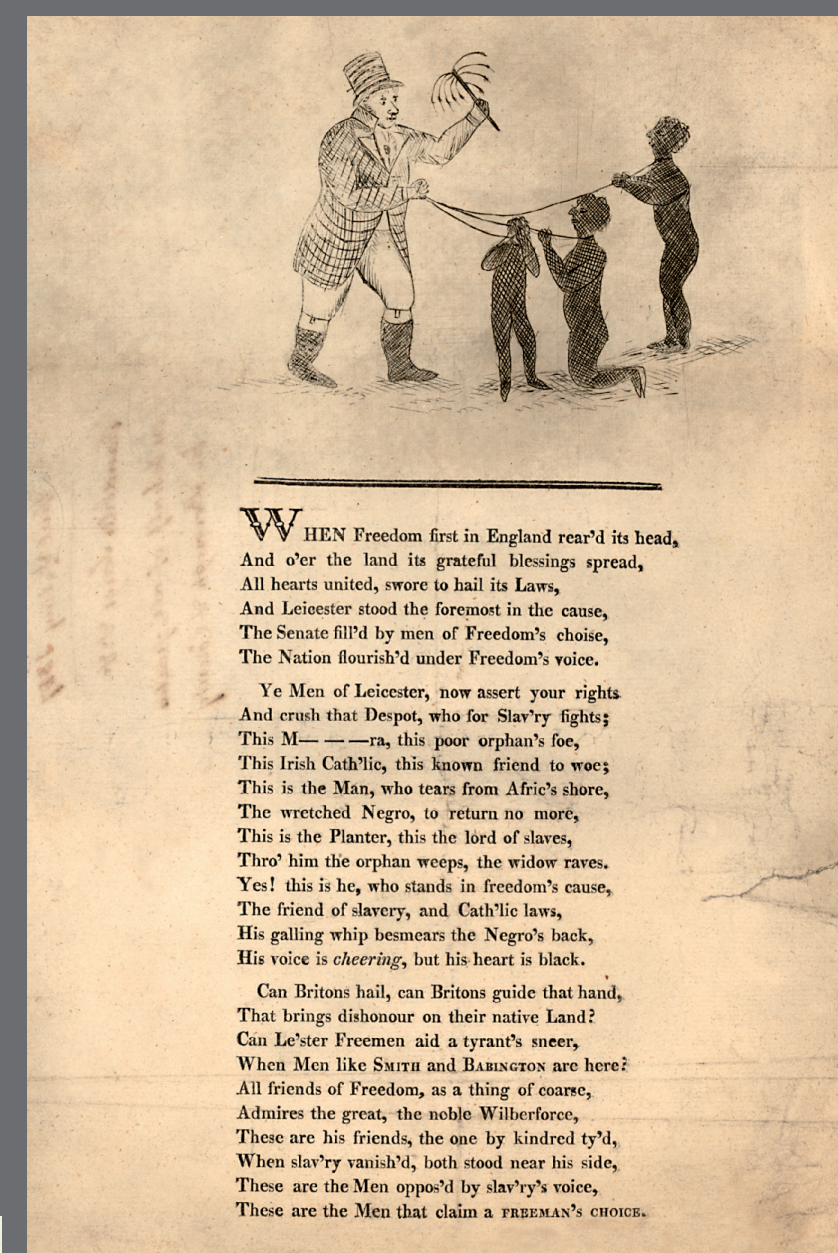
Thomas Babington (1758-1837) inherited Rothley and other land in Leicestershire in 1776. He was educated at St John's College, Cambridge, where he met William Wilberforce and other prominent anti-slavery agitators. He was also influenced by the women in his life. His mother, Lydia, was a member of the London Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the late 1780s. His wife, Jean, was the sister of Zachary Macaulay, a leader of the anti-slavery movement in the early 19th century.

Babington was an evangelical Christian of independent means who devoted himself to a number of good causes. He offered to pay half the cost of smallpox inoculation for people in Rothley in 1784-5. He set up a local Friendly Society to purchase corn for sale to the poor at a lower price to improve the lives and diet of his estate workers. He supported moves to extend voting rights to more people. He was High Sheriff of Leicestershire in 1780 and one of the Leicester MPs from 1800 until 1818.

He died at Rothley Temple in 1837 at the age of 78, and is buried in the chapel there.



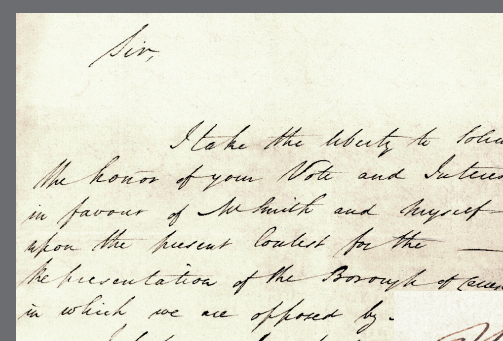
Interior of Rothley Temple's chapel, where Thomas Babington is buried in front of the altar.



**W**HEN Freedom first in England rear'd its head,  
And o'er the land its grateful blessings spread,  
All hearts united, swore to hail its Laws,  
And Leicester stood the foremost in the cause,  
The Senate fill'd by men of Freedom's choice,  
The Nation flourish'd under Freedom's voice.

Ye Men of Leicester, now assert your rights  
And crush that Despot, who for Slav'ry fights;  
This M— — — — — ra, this poor orphan's foe,  
This Irish Cath'lic, this known friend to woe;  
This is the Man, who tears from Africa's shore,  
The wretched Negro, to return no more,  
This is the Planter, this the lord of slaves,  
Thro' him the orphan weeps, the widow raves.  
Yes! this is he, who stands in freedom's cause,  
The friend of slavery, and Cath'lic laws,  
His galling whip besmears the Negro's back,  
His voice is cheering, but his heart is black.

Can Britons hail, can Britons guide that hand,  
That brings dishonour on their native Land?  
Can Le'ster Freemen aid a tyrant's sneer,  
When Men like SMITH and BABINGTON are here?  
All friends of Freedom, as a thing of course,  
Admires the great, the noble WILBERFORCE,  
These are his friends, the one by kindred ty'd,  
When slav'ry vanish'd, both stood near his side,  
These are the Men oppos'd by slav'ry's voice,  
These are the Men that claim a FREEMAN'S CHOICE.



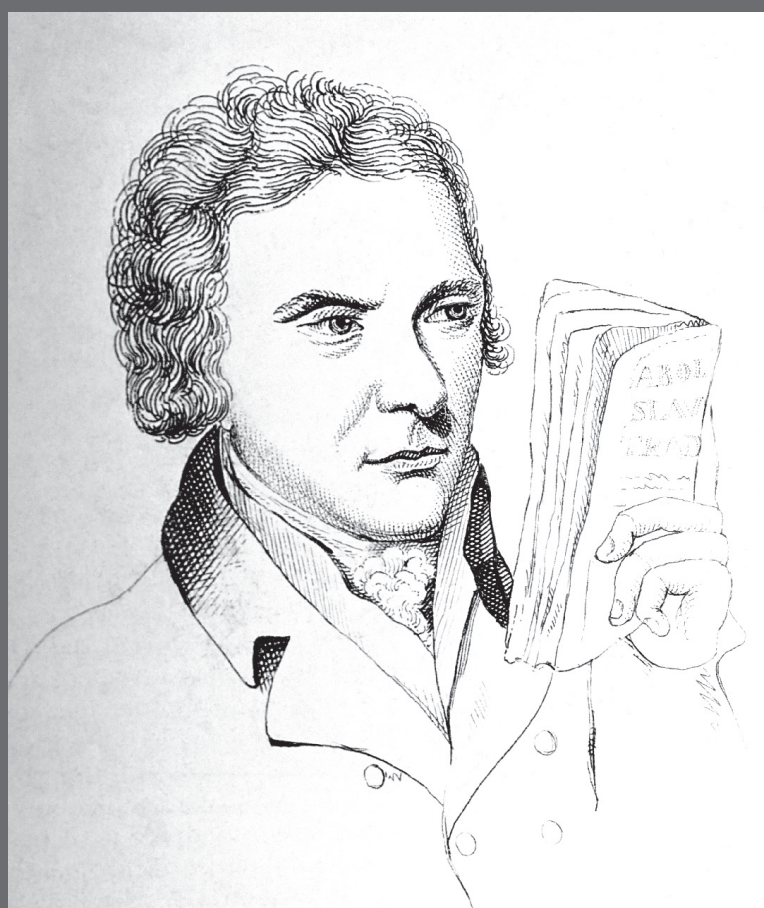
The slave trade was an election issue in Leicester in 1807. The poster headed with a crude line drawing of an overseer about to whip three slaves urges the electors to vote for Babington and Smith, supporters of Wilberforce. 'These are his friends.... Both stood by his side, these are the men oppos'd by slav'ry's voice....'

In this draft handbill Babington appeals for votes.





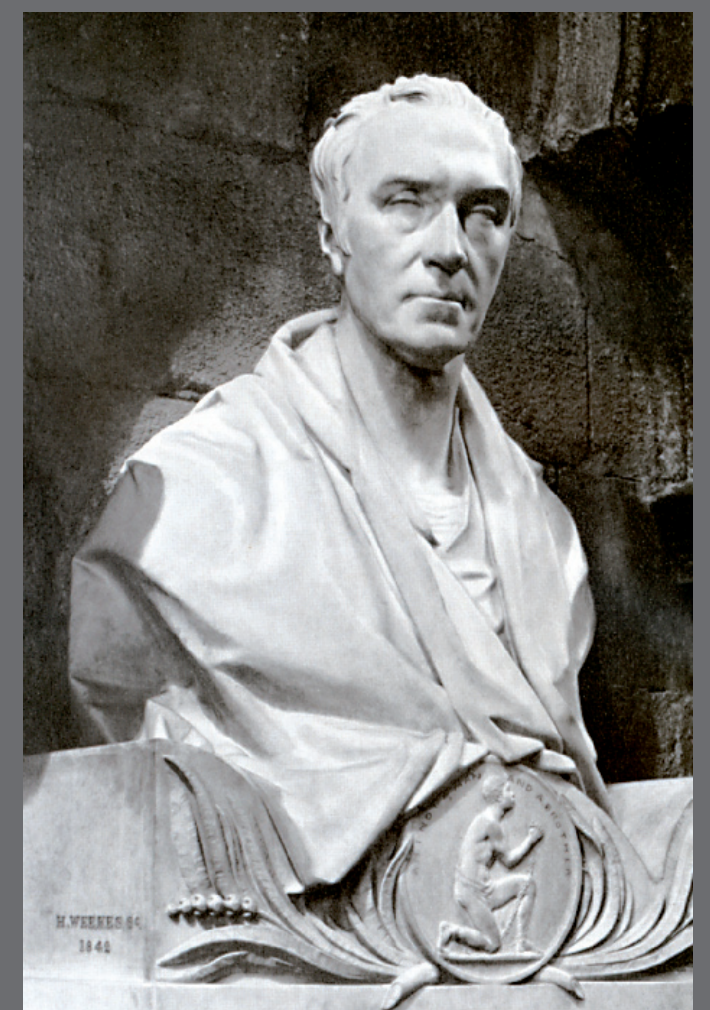
## Thomas Babington and the Wilberforce Connection



William Wilberforce, friend of Thomas Babington, best-known campaigner for the abolition of the slave trade, and frequent visitor to Rothley Temple.

Rothley Temple was the home of Thomas Babington, a leading supporter of the movement to abolish the slave trade. William Wilberforce and other members of the London Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, formed in 1787, used to meet at Rothley regularly. The house has been called the 'holiday headquarters of the movement'.

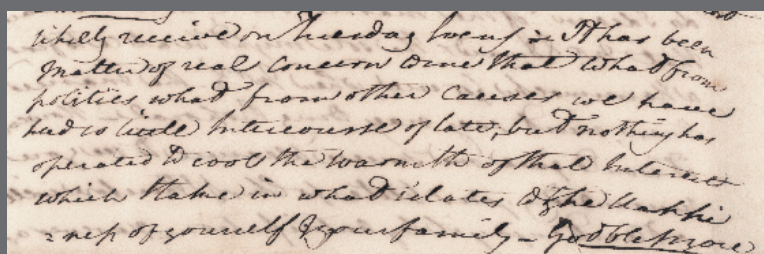
Thomas Babington had known Wilberforce and other Abolitionists since they were all at Cambridge University. This close circle of friends was convinced that slavery was evil and should be ended as soon as possible. Babington supported the anti-slavery cause throughout his life. He was elected as a Leicester MP in 1800 on an anti-slavery platform. He lived to see not just the abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1807, but also the abolition of slavery in British colonies in 1833.



Zachary Macaulay, brother-in-law of Thomas Babington, and another leading abolitionist, said about Rothley Temple in 1789: 'To this place I owe myself'. He returned from 4 miserable years as manager on a sugar plantation in Jamaica, and Babington helped him to recover. Macaulay's first child, born at Rothley in 1800, was Thomas Babington Macaulay, the historian and Parliamentarian.

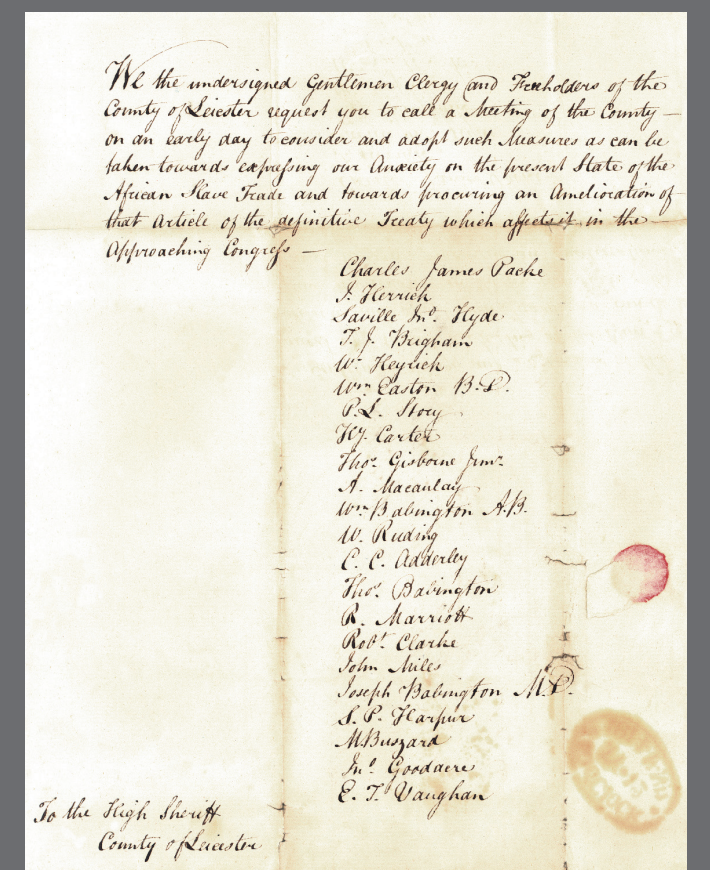


Rothley Temple, often visited by William Wilberforce and other members of the Abolitionist group, purchased by the Babington family in 1565 and inherited by Thomas Babington in 1776. A view from the 1790s, from Nichols' *History and Antiquities of Leicester*, contrasts with a mid-20th century photograph, taken before the house became a hotel.



Letter from Wilberforce to another friend and supporter, Sir Gerard Edwards (later Noel) at Catmose, 1789: 'It has been a matter of real concern to me that what from politics, what from other causes we have had so little Intercourse of late'.

*Very sincerely  
Yours  
W. Wilberforce*



List of local gentlemen, clergy and freeholders of Leicestershire who wanted to express their 'Anxiety on the present State of the African Slave Trade', 1814. Three Babington family members appear on the list: Thomas; his younger brother William, then Rector of Cossington; and another younger brother, Joseph, a doctor practising in Ludlow.