

Narrator: In 1807 Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave trade act which outlawed the carrying of slaves by British ships in the British Empire. This did not however end slavery in itself, but it did mark the point at which Britain transformed itself into an international campaigner against the slave trade.
A further long campaign led by abolitionists, including William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, met with success with the Emancipation Act of 1833 when slavery in the British Colonies was finally abolished

Although situated away from the major sea ports, this local area did have links to the slave trade.

- There is historical evidence to show that mills in Batley sent coarse bad cloth to America for slave clothing.
- The Beaumont family had an Ethiopian servant from the west coast of Guinea and records show that he was baptized at Kirkheaton church in 1782.
- Henry Batt, formerly of Oakwell Hall in Birstall, stated in his will that his brother was to receive all his lands and negroes in Virginia.

Those opposing slavery included Henry Venn, a former vicar of this church and John Wesley a regular preacher in this area. Another campaigner, the Methodist minister, Thomas Jeffery went to the West Indies to fight for the rights of those kept in slavery after the trade was abolished.

In this presentation we would like to introduce you to some more of the anti slavery campaigners who also had connections with the local area.

Having just heard the singing of the hymn Amazing Grace, I'd now like to introduce you to the writer of those wonderful lyrics, John Newton.

Newton: I was born in London on 24th July 1725. My parents, though not wealthy, were respectable. My father was many years master of a ship in the Mediterranean trade. My mother was a dissenter, a pious woman and I have been told that from my birth she had in her mind devoted me to the ministry. But the Lord appointed otherwise, my mother died before I was 7 years of age.

When my father returned to sea after my mother's death, he married again. My father was a very sensible and moral man as the world rates morality, but neither he nor my stepmother was under the impressions of religion. I was therefore much left to myself to mingle with idle and wicked boys and soon learnt their ways.

From the age of eleven I made 5 voyages on board my father's ship and by this time my sinful propensities and gathered strength by habit; I was very wicked and therefore very foolish.

Narrator: At the age of 18, Newton was press-ganged on board HMS Harwich. Unable to adhere to the rigid discipline Newton deserted ship. He was sought, found, stripped and flogged and after being discharged from the Royal Navy was dispatched onto a slave trading ship. However, Newton's rebellious nature led to a falling out with the ship's owner and his African wife which led to him spending a year in captivity in West Africa. Half-starved, Newton was forced to scavenge for food.

Newton: I have sometimes been relieved by strangers, yea even by the slaves in the chain, who have secretly brought me victuals (for they durst not be seen doing it) from their own slender pittance.

Narrator: Soon after his release, Newton himself became a master of slaves.
At the age of 22, Newton encountered a violent storm whilst en route to England from Africa – this experience led to his remarkable conversion from sinner to true believer.

Newton: I went to bed that night in my usual security and indifference, but was awakened from a sound sleep by the force of a violent sea which broke on board us. So much of it came down below as filled the cabin I lay in with water. This alarm was followed by a cry from the deck that the ship was going down. We made ourselves fast with ropes that we may not be washed away.

Being almost spent with cold and labour, I said almost without any meaning, "The Lord have mercy on us!"

I was instantly struck with my own words What mercy can there be for me - believing that my sins were too great to be forgiven.

About six in the evening I learnt the ship was freed from water and there arose a gleam of hope.

I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour - I began to pray.

Narrator: After a long and dangerous voyage, the ship eventually anchored safely off North West Ireland.

Newton: About this time I began to know that there is a God that hears and answers prayers.
Throughout my life I never forgot that great turning day in 1748, for it was on this day that I discovered "How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed."

Narrator: I would now like to introduce you to a former slave, Olaudah Equiano also known as Gustavas Vassa, .

Equiano: I was born in a village in the kingdom of Benin in West Africa in 1745. When I was about ten, I was kidnapped and was taken to the coast where I saw white men for the first time. The white people looked and acted as I thought in so savage a manner for I had never seen among my people such instances of brutal cruelty.

I was sold to slave traders and transported to Barbados. We were told that we were not to be eaten, but to work and were soon to go on land where we should see many of our country people. Sure enough they came to us Africans of all languages.

From there I was sent to the English colony of Virginia where I was later purchased for about £30 by a British naval officer named Captain Henry Pascal. It was Pascal who gave me the name Gustavas Vassa.

Narrator: Slave owners often renamed their slaves as a way of taking away their identity and demonstrating total control over their new possessions.

Equiano: As Pascal's slave I was introduced to the naval way of life which provided me with new opportunities. I was brought to England and I was sent to school where I learned to read and write. However, my schooling was interrupted by periods at sea. I fought for the British and saw action in Canada and the Mediterranean. Having also been baptized, I felt that I was entitled to my share of the money handed out to sailors and to my freedom.

Narrator: Equiano was sold to a number of owners but eventually he managed to save up his wages and was successful in buying his own freedom for £40

Equiano: I who had been a slave in the morning trembling at the will of another, now became my only master and completely free. I thought this was the happiest day I had ever experienced.

Narrator: Eventually Equiano returned to London and became involved in the political and legal efforts to outlaw slavery and the slave trade. At the height of the popular campaign to abolish the slave trade, Equiano was encouraged by his friends to write his own account of his experiences.

Equiano: I believe it is difficult for those who publish their own memoirs to escape the imputation of vanity. It is also their misfortune that whatever is uncommon is rarely, if ever believed. If it affords any satisfaction to my numerous friends at whose request it has been written, or in the smallest degree promotes the interest of humanity, the ends for which it was undertaken will be fully attained and every wish of my heart gratified.

Narrator: The book was entitled "The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano". The book was published in 1789 by subscription and subsequent editions saw the total number of subscribers rising to over 1,000. Amongst the subscribers to the fourth edition were local couple Law and Susannah Atkinson of Mould Green who purchased a total of 100 copies. The Atkinson family owned Bradley Mills. We know that the Atkinsons and Equiano were in correspondence with each other.

Susannah: March 29th in the year of our Lord 1791

Since my much valued Friend did not receive the few lines directed to Halifax - and since my Husband has come home and informed me you wish'd to have a few lines from me - I could not think of going to Manchester without leaving you a few lines-hoping you are here to receive it for tho' your Friend Susannah Atkinson will not be here to see you-yet she leaves her (husband) Law who will always meet *you*, my Friend with pleasure nor will he be the only one who will see you here with pleasure -Miss Frith who is so kind as to become my housekeeper-will be also glad to see you.

I am sorry to hear you are low - suffer yourself not to be hurt with trifles since you must in this transitory and deceitful World meet with many unpleasing changes. I was sorry we should be so unfortunate as to recommend you to any who should in the least slight you, which seem'd to be the case at Elland - but I sincerely hope you have since experienced that friendship and civility from those you have been with, which has amply made up for the treatment you there received. But you have a friend above who can afford you more *real* comfort than Mortals here can give-not but friends are a Blessing-and afford that comfort-which I hope you will never want- but it is, I believe, absolutely necessary that we should meet with rebuffs-otherwise our Affections would be wholly placed here-which would in the end prove our destruction.

But I ought to check my pen, as you have seen more of the World than me-and must of course know how to place a proper dependence on both God and Man-may he ever direct and watch over you. Fear not, those who depend on him he will defend and also in *the end* befriend- should I ever be so happy to see you again-(and I hope and trust I shall) I hope I need not say how happy I shall always be to see you. This I flatter myself you are assured of.

I thank you for your picture-believe me we shall value it much. We will have it framed and hung with our own Family who are doing now. I hope you may see it. It won't be done the next time you come-but hope you will see it the time *after* next. Till then may God preserve and Guide you-and believe me to be ever sincerely your well wisher-and Friend-Susannah Atkinson

N.B. Miss Haigh and Cousin Tinkler leave their respects. .

Equiano:- To the printer of the Leeds Mercury April 16th 1791.

Having received particular marks of kindness from Mr. Law Atkinson and Family, of Huddersfield, and many Gentlemen and Ladies, &c., of and near this town, who have purchased my genuine and interesting Narrative; I beg to offer them my warmest thanks; and also to the friends of humanity here, on behalf of my much oppressed countrymen, whose case calls aloud for redress.

May this year bear record of acts worthy of a British Senate, and you have a satisfaction of seeing the completion of the work you have so humanely assisted in

'Tis now the duty of everyone, who is a friend to religion and humanity, to assist the different Committees engaged in this pious work. Those who can feel for the distresses of their own countrymen will also commiserate the case of the poor Africans. Since that it does not often fall to the lot of individuals to contribute to so important a moral and religious duty, as that of putting an end to a practice, which may, without exaggeration, be stiled one of the greatest evils now existing on the earth, it may be hoped, that each one will now use his utmost endeavours for that purpose.

The Wise Man saith-"Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

Permit me, dear friends, on behalf of myself and countrymen, to offer you the warmest effusions of a heart replete with gratitude.

I am, with constant prayers for your health and happiness,

Worthy friends,

Your respectful humble Servant

Gustavas Vassa

The African

Narrator: Ironically Susannah Atkinson's descendants were the owners of the cotton mill at Colne bridge which was the scene of a tragic fire in 1818. Seventeen young girls perished in a fire at the factory after being locked in the building. A monument in Kirkheaton churchyard reads:-

Susannah Near this place lie what remained of the bodies of 17 children.

A striking and awful instance of the uncertainty of life and the vanity of human attainments.

Narrator: Our final campaigner is Richard Oastler better known as The Factory King who compared transatlantic slavery to employee conditions in Yorkshire factories.

Oastler: I was born in Leeds in 1789 and attended Fulneck School at Pudsey. On leaving school I became very interested in the speeches of William Wilberforce and actively supported his campaign for the abolition of slavery. I wanted to become an architect, but my poor eyesight prevented me from pursuing this career and I took my father's old job of commission agent, working for Thomas Thornhill who owned the Fixby estate.

Narrator:- In 1830 Oastler met a man called John Wood, who was a worsted manufacturer in Bradford. Wood challenged Oastler as to why he had never acknowledged the cruelty and working conditions in the factories of Britain when he had spoken so enthusiastically against slavery in the West Indies. Wood proceeded to describe the appalling conditions in the local textile mills. On returning home Oastler wrote a letter to the Leeds Mercury which would be ranked as one of the most famous letters of the 19th century.

Oastler:-
Insert letter.

Narrator:- This bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade act is an important opportunity for all of us to reflect on the struggles of the past, - to remember those who have suffered - and to pay tribute to all those people – Black and white – who campaigned for abolition and to question why slavery still exists in many parts of the world today.