

Hartley Library — University of Southampton

The Special Collections Gallery

Exhibition Catalogue

*'Irreconcilable with the principles of humanity and justice':
the trade in slaves and its abolition*

5 February 2007 - 30 March 2007

Special Collections Gallery Exhibition
**‘Irreconcilable with the principles of humanity and justice’:
the trade in slaves and its abolition**

On 25 March 1807 the royal assent was given to an Act of Parliament abolishing the slave trade. Slavery did not appear at any particular point, and nor did it disappear in 1807. So why was 1807 significant, why was abolition carried at this point and what did it achieve? Over the preceding thirty years there had been a growing tide of feeling that slavery was objectionable on moral grounds. Although 2007 is the bicentenary of this legislation, what was especially noteworthy about the anti-slavery movement was the strength of feeling that it evoked outside Parliament. This was a popular reform movement, with many of the tactics now associated with pressure groups — propaganda, petitions, and a network of local and regional adjuncts to national bodies. Slavery was long established, even if it was unusual in northern Europe; but this contrary feeling was new. It was widely taken up by the middle classes of late eighteenth-century England, by non-conformists and evangelical Christians, radicals and patriots, and by men, women and children of all persuasions.

A number of distinctions should be made in the process of abolition. In 1807, it was the slave trade that was abolished, not the practice of slavery, that is, the ownership of slaves. Although individual slaves might be made free (manumission) in special circumstances, emancipation of all slaves in the British West Indies had to wait until 1833. While the 1833 Act encompassed all British colonies, other parts of the empire were treated differently: the possessions controlled by the East India Company, St Helena and Ceylon were excluded from the legislation, and the implementation of the Act’s provisions was to be more gradual at Mauritius and the Cape of Good Hope. A British Act could only abolish the trade where there was British jurisdiction: in the first instance the trade could only be halted where British ships or British territories were involved. Just as slavery had not appeared at any particular point, nor did it disappear at the stroke of a pen: a long process was inevitable.

The 1807 Act was remarkable from many points of view: its altruism was exceptional, and in economic terms the consequences for British colonies were to be substantial. Other countries had different perspectives: in the United States, the nineteenth century saw an expansion of slavery through the southern states into Texas; and in South America, the trade into Brazil was an essential component in maintaining a labour force as late as the middle of the century. What was also significant, however, was that an international community was brought to this conclusion without major conflict. Unilateral abolition in 1807 was followed by a series of bilateral agreements made by the British government to bring other countries to abolition. This required intense diplomatic activity through the nineteenth century, with British naval support for enforcement.

The focus of the arguments in favour of abolition was on a common humanity; those arguing to the contrary looked at economics, or custom, especially that enshrined in some legal and religious practices. In Britain, a small group of individuals was instrumental in putting the case for abolition, often persuaded to the cause by their encounters with slaves who had been

brought into the country by their owners. Prominent among these were Granville Sharp (1735-1813), William Wilberforce (1759-1833), Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846), Henry Brougham, first Baron Brougham (1778-1853), and Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786-1845). Concerted pressure was brought to bear from the 1770s onwards: legal cases turned on whether any man in Britain could be the property of another. In administering its colonies, pragmatism often required a different view of slavery. The support of slaves in North America for the British in the American War of Independence came with a guarantee of emancipation. Wilberforce was able to make an effective impression on social and political leaders, and in May 1787, he was urged by William Pitt, the Prime Minister, and William Grenville to take the lead in this cause. The role of Thomas Clarkson was to gather evidence of the iniquities of the trade and to mount a campaign to persuade the public: in the same month in 1787, he was among the founding members of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. This was an independent organisation, although working with Wilberforce, and it was publicity generated through its methods, promoting subscriptions, circular letters, and cameos of slaves and slavery, that formed popular opinion. The focus of Wilberforce's work was Parliament. He first gave notice of a motion for the abolition of the slave trade in 1788, but fell ill and was unable to proceed. Pitt, however, took the initiative, with investigations into the trade by the Privy Council and subsequently by the House of Commons. At the same time, activity outside Parliament was crucial to maintaining the impetus of the campaign. In 1792, 519 petitions on the subject — the largest number (until this point) to be submitted on a single subject or in a single session — were presented to the House of Commons. It is probable that some 400,000 people were involved. The result was a series of Acts, regulating the trade, aimed at ameliorating the position of slaves on board ship — the horrendous conditions of the 'middle passage' between Africa and America.

Case 1

The origins of slavery and the case for abolition

Why had there been slavery in the first place? To late eighteenth-century Englishmen, the notion that their own countrymen might be slaves was abhorrent. Slavery had been widespread in the Roman empire, and there had probably been slaves in Anglo-Saxon England. The unfree villeins of medieval England had a status that was in some ways similar; but the idea that humans might be chattels had been put aside after the Black Death, in changed economic circumstances. Slavery was uncommon in northern Europe, but it was not so in southern Europe and Africa. Here it had a different basis and it may be closely linked to the growth in the trade in tropical commodities, especially those of great value — sugar, coffee, chocolate, tobacco, rice and cotton. Some of these crops were grown in Europe in the Middle Ages: for example, the cultivation of sugar moved westwards through the Mediterranean during the medieval period. Slave labour, at least on a small scale, had been used in cultivating these commodities before the European discovery of America. On the Cape Verde Islands (about 300 miles west of Senegal), in the 1460s, a Genoese, Antonio da Noli, failing to attract European settlers to these territories, recently discovered by the Portuguese, established a sugar plantation that was entirely dependent on slave labour. The extension of this enterprise westwards — and the slave economy with it — first by the Spanish and the Portuguese, and then by northern Europeans, was not an inexplicable step.

The slaves of the Mediterranean derived from a long-standing trade in humans as chattels especially within Africa, but also within Ottoman and Asian territories. In the medieval period, slaves had been brought up to the Mediterranean from sub-Saharan Africa; from the sixteenth century, a direct trade was opened up between the West African coast and the Americas. Slavery was usually the result of legal and other penalties, and resulted as well from capture in warfare. It was a trade of many nations and was an established part of many societies. The exception was northern Europe, and it was from here that the challenge to slavery came. If it was reprehensible for there to be slaves in Britain, why should there be slaves in British colonies ?

1 Alexander Falconbridge (late surgeon in the African trade) *An account of the slave trade on the coast of Africa* (London, 1788)
[Rare Books HT 1321 77-103097]

Falconbridge gave an important account of the trade — it was descriptions like this that brought widespread abhorrence of slavery and framed popular opinion. He was also concerned with the effect of the trade on seamen (and this volume was presented to the University Library by the National Union of Seamen):

Leaving to abler pens to expatiate more at large on the injustice and inhumanity of the Slave Trade, I shall content myself with giving some account of the hardships which the unhappy objects of it undergo, and the cruelties they suffer, from the period of their being reduced to a state of slavery, to their being disposed of in the West India islands; where, I fear, their grievances find little alleviation. At the same time, I shall treat of a subject, which appears not to have been attended to in the manner its importance requires; that is, the sufferings and loss of the seamen employed in this trade; which, from the intemperance of the climate, the inconveniences they labour under during the voyage, and the severity of most of the commanders, occasion the destruction of great numbers annually.

2 Granville Sharp *The just limitation of slavery in the laws of God, compared with the unbounded claims of the African traders and British American slaveholders* (London, 1776). This copy comes from the Wheler Library, the Basingstoke parish library, where it would have been readily available to a wider readership.
[Rare Books HT 1033 76-116979]

Granville Sharp, as well as focusing on the judgment in the Somerset case of 1772, a *cause célèbre* which he had done much to orchestrate (on the capture in London of James Somerset, a slave brought to England from North America as a servant, and who had decided to desert his master rather than return as a slave to the Caribbean), reviewed the Englishman's duty as a Christian to oppose slavery.

... and though the Africans have, since [the fourth century], lamentably fallen back into gross ignorance [of Christianity], yet we must not, on that account, look upon them in the same light that the Jews did upon 'the children of the strangers', whom they were permitted to hold in slavery (Levit. XXV. 45) because we cannot do so without becoming *strangers* ourselves to Christianity; and hastening *our own apostacy*, which seems already too near at hand. We may lament the fallen state of our unhappy brethren, but we have *no commission under the Gospel* to punish them for it, as the Israelites had to punish the *Heathens* that were condemned in the law ! Our endeavour should be rather to restore the *Heathens* to their lost privileges, than to harden them in their prejudices by tolerating amongst us a greater degree of *despotism* and *oppression* than was ever permitted among the *Jews*, or even among the ancient *Heathens* ! For in one of our own *anti-Christian* colonies, even the *murder* of a negro slave, when under *private* punishment, is *tolerated* (see the 329th act of Barbadoes); and by

the same diabolical act of assembly a man may 'of wantonness, or of bloody mindedness, or cruel intention' (it is expressly said) 'wilfully kill a negro, or other slave of his own,' without any other penalty for it than a trifling fine of £15 sterling ... Many instances of West-India cruelty have fallen even within my own knowledge, and I have certain proofs of no less than three married women being violently torn away from their lawful husbands, even in London, by the order of their pretended proprietors !

3 Granville Sharp *The law of retribution; or, a serious warning to Great Britain and her colonies, founded on unquestionable examples of God's temporal vengeance against tyrants, slave-holders and oppressors* (London, 1776). From the Wheler Library.

[*Rare Books HT 1165 76-116997*]

4 An album containing anti-slavery tracts and pamphlets, late 1820s, probably compiled in the West Midlands, including reports of The Female Society for Birmingham, Westbromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their Respective Neighbourhoods, for the Relief of British Negro Slaves, established, April 8, 1825

[*Rare Books HT1163 71-082284*]

Further examples of the outrages of the trade served to maintain anti-slavery as a cause at the forefront of the public mind. Among the contents of this album were passages drawn from the works of Granville Sharp and Charles James Fox. It was prefaced by an engraving and a stanza from Cowper:

I would not have a Slave to till my ground
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought and sold have ever earn'd.
We have no Slaves at home — why then abroad ?

Among the other engravings was an iconic depiction of the transatlantic trade: 'The representation of the brig *Vigilante* from Nantes, a vessel employed in the slave trade, which was captured by Lieutenant Mildmay in the River Bonny, on the coast of Africa, on the 15th of April 1822. She was 240 tons burden and had on board at the time she was taken 345 slaves. The slaves were found lying on their backs on the lower deck as represented below, those in the centre were sitting, some in the posture in which they are there shewn and others with their legs bent under them, resting upon the soles of their feet.'

5 Thomas Clarkson *An essay on the comparative efficiency of regulation or abolition, as applied to the slave trade: shewing that the latter only can remove the evils to be found in that commerce* (London, 1789)

[*Rare Books HT 1033 71-079640*]

Clarkson set out, in the guise of a letter to a friend, what he considered should be the provisions of anti-slavery legislation, as a response to the merchants of Liverpool, who 'are preparing a bill, not a bill of mere theory and speculation, such as lately appeared, but a bill, from local knowledge and experience, to obviate every reasonable complaint, and establish every necessary regulation in the African trade. This news is of a very pleasing kind. It is, I say, of a very pleasing kind, because it affords a proof, that the slave merchants acknowledge abuses or evils which they denied before. In consequence of the information you have given

me, it is my intention almost immediately to sit down and anticipate the bill you mention. It is my intention to state what are the evils in the slave trade, of what nature the said bill ought to be to remove them, and what the advocates for humanity will expect to find in it.’

6 [Joseph Blanco White] *Bosquexo del comercio en esclavos: y reflexiones sobre este tráfico considerado moral, politica, y cristianamente* [London, 1814]
[Wellington pamphlets 669]

Slavery was an international trade and anti-slavery was an international campaign. Based on the letter of Wilberforce to his constituents, Joseph Blanco White rehearsed the position of the Spanish liberals. The Spanish Cortes had decreed the abolition of the slave trade on 2 April 1811; a representation was received from Havana, 20 July 1811, in support of the protection given by the Spanish government to the slave trade. Blanco White also drew attention to the different positions on the slave trade that might be taken by Christianity and Islam.

7 Copy of a letter of 25 May 1822, from Lord Strangford, the British ambassador at Constantinople, to Lord Londonderry, the Foreign Secretary. Strangford reported a meeting of his interpreter with Gianib Effendi, the former Ottoman minister for Foreign Affairs, who was acting as a co-adjutor to his successor, to consider his remonstrances on the enslavement of Greek captives from Scio [Chios]. Gianib Effendi’s response, though coloured by his anger at the support many in Britain gave to the cause of Greek independence, nonetheless provides a Mediterranean perspective on slavery, that it was of long standing, widely accepted and part of the normal course of law. This copy was prepared by the Foreign Office for first Duke of Wellington, the British minister plenipotentiary at the Congress of Verona.
[MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/711/6]

I wish I could say that I had been equally successful with respect to the unfortunate captives who have been sent here [Constantinople] from Scio. I sent M. Chabert with a friendly message to Giannib Effendi on the subject begging him to consider the unfavorable effect which would be produced on the public mind in Europe by the severities which the Porte [the Ottoman government] was exercising against innocent and helpless persons who had taken no part in the rebellion and who seemed to be rather entitled to the pity, than to be considered as objects of the vengeance of the government.

Gianib Effendi received my message without any sign of impatience, but in reply, he made some observations which he appeared to think quite unanswerable and on which he dwelt with the utmost complacency. He said that the captives taken at Scio were condemned to slavery by the Mussulman laws and religion; which not only permitted but enjoined such a disposal of the wives and children of their enemies; that without having the plea of law or religion the Christian powers of Europe had for ages tolerated slavery — not because their Messiah commanded it, but because it was a source of gain — that it was true England had abolished it, but it was only of late years that we had found out it was wrong, and that half Europe still differed from our opinion upon the subject; that if those powers had so long endured the constant practice of the Turkish nation, and had uttered not a word in reprobation of it for nearly four hundred years, it would indeed be singular if they were not to call in question the right of the Mussulman government to do that which they had done from time immemorial and which was at present more than ever justified by the cruel and atrocious conduct of the Greek rebels, who far from making captives, spared neither women nor children. He added that tho’ he gave me full credit for the friendly spirit which had dictated my advice, he requested me to remember that the Porte was an independent government, that she had a right to act as she pleased toward her subjects, except where treaties interfered and that the Mussulman nation would pursue and maintain its own laws and usages without caring for the opinions of other states, which had no right to meddle with them, that even Russia had never attempted to force Turkey to abolish slavery, and that some time ago when there was a long and vehement discussion between the two courts respecting some Circassian slaves, the utmost to which Russia pretended was that those slaves should be free

from the moment landed in the Russian territory, without seeking to impose upon Turkey the general principle that she was not entitled to make slaves of her own subjects whenever she chose to do so. "Slavery" continued Gianib Effendi "is a mode of punishment, and it might just as well be said that we had not the right to inflict the punishment of death, or that of the bastinado, upon offenders, as that the powers of Europe are to find fault with us because we make captives of the families of those who are trying every means in their power to destroy our Empire. Why do not the Christian sovereigns interfere to prevent the Emperor of Russia from sending his subjects into Siberia ? Because they know very well what answer they would receive ! Thus there is one law of humanity for Turkey and another for Russia !"

The same arguments were used by Gianib Effendi to the Prussian Dragoman, whom Baron Millitz had sent to him with a message similar to mine on the subject of the unfortunate captives from Scio.

Case 2

Slavery and the West Indian economy: Jamaica

Between the seventeenth century and Abolition in the region of 12.5 million slaves were traded from Africa. The numbers and pattern can be established with some certainty, especially from financial records. These point to significant differences in the use of slaves. Many worked with tropical goods: some 3.5 million slaves, for example, went to Brazil, whereas as few as 500,000 went taken to North America. The disparity arose partly because of the type of work undertaken: in tropical climates, the slaves were used for hard manual labour, particularly with sugar cane, and they had a low life expectancy — here the slave population could be sustained only by continued import of labour. In North America, on the other hand, where the slaves were primarily used for cotton and tobacco growing, the dynamics of the slave population were similar to the white population, even increasing modestly.

In 1788, there were on Jamaica some 250,000 slaves, who provided heavy labour crucial to the success of the plantation economy. The West India merchants constituted a powerful interest, to which governments might defer. The resolutions of the Jamaican House of Assembly, faced with the prospect of abolition, refuted charges of improper and inhuman treatment of slaves. They noted, however, that the labour force would be reduced; that it was impossible to cultivate the West Indies with white labour; and that the wider economy of Great Britain and its empire was closely bound to the West Indies. Credit, mortgages and annuities required stability. The property and slaves on Jamaica were valued at £39 million: 'The whole profits and produce of which capital, as also of the various branches of commerce to which it give rise, center in Great Britain, and add to the national wealth; while the navigation, necessary to all its branches, establishes a strength which wealth can neither purchase nor balance.' Changes in slave ownership would require compensation.

Abolition brought severe economic consequences to the West Indies, where new slaves had been important to maintain the size of the labour force. Abolition in the United States of America, in 1808, however, had a very different impact, as new slaves were not continually required to replenish the work force, which was already self-sustaining.

8 Report, resolutions, and remonstrance, of the Honourable the Council and Assembly of Jamaica, at a joint committee on the subject of the slave-trade, in a session which began the 20th of October, 1789

[Rare books HT1096 71-079079]

‘The response of the Jamaica House of Assembly to the proceedings in the House of Commons in the last session of Parliament relating to the slave trade:

1st resolution: ‘That the suppression, either direct or virtual, of the slave trade, by the British nation only (other nations continuing the trade as usual) would not promote the purposes of humanity, either in respect of the negroes which are annually brought to the African markets for sale, or in regard to the negroes at present in a state of slavery in this and the rest of the British Islands in the West Indies. The effect in Africa of a partial abolition, would be this, that the purchasers from Europe being fewer in number would have a greater choice of slaves, equal to the whole demand of the British merchants at present, which is stated at 38000 annually; whereby prime slaves only would be saleable, and the aged and infirm (many of whom are now purchased of necessity) being rejected in greater numbers than formerly, the horrid practice which has long existed among the slave merchants on the coast, of putting to death such of their captives as are brought to market and rejected by the Europeans, would be more prevalent than ever. In the British West Indies, the effect (however lightly felt at first) must necessarily, in the course of a few years, from an unavoidable decrease, consequent on the present inequality of the sexes, have this operation, that the labour which is now performed by a given number of negroes must either be performed by a less number, or the planter must contract the limits of his plantation, and diminish his produce. Thus immediate interest and in many cases urgent distress from the importunity of creditors, will be set in opposition to the principles of justice and the dictates of humanity.’

The remonstrance that accompanied the resolutions, addressed to the House of Commons, recorded: ‘An abolition of the slave trade of Great Britain cannot but prove fatal to her colonial interests: and this blow is meditated when, after having struggled for several successive years with most calamitous visitations of Providence, a dawn of hope just opens upon us, of fulfilling all our pecuniary engagements with Great Britain, and gathering the fruits of our toil.’

9 W.Beckford *A descriptive account of the island of Jamaica: with remarks upon the cultivation of the sugar-cane, throughout the different seasons of the year, and chiefly considered in a picturesque point of view; also observations and reflections upon what would probably be the consequences of an abolition of the slave-trade, and of the emancipation of the slaves* (2 vols., London, 1790)
[Rare Books F1870 71-027119]

10 ‘To the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, this map of the island of Jamaica, constructed from actual surveys, under the authority of the Hon. House of Assembly; by whom it hath been examined, and unanimously approved; is, with his gracious permission, most humbly inscribed by His Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subject and servant, James Robertson A.M. late of Jamaica, engraved by S.I.Neele, No. 352 Strand, London.’ Scale: 1 inch to 2 miles. The map was annotated and coloured for the Ordnance Office: ‘The parts tinged with carmine shews the situations of which particular plans are transmitted. The roads shaded of a gravel colour are the communications between the several military posts as referred to in the report from Sir Charles Shipley dated 30 Apr 1808’. c.1808
[MS 61 Wellington Papers 15/27]

11 ‘Trelawney Town, the chief residence of the Maroons’: plate from B.Edwards *History of the British West Indies ... with a continuation to the present time* (5 vols., and plates, London, 1818-19)
[Rare Books F2131 52-045439]

The Maroons were in origin free or runaway negro slaves, the term derived from the Spanish *cimarrón* or ‘wild’. After the British captured Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655, the Maroons remained at liberty and were able to harass the British for sustained periods of time.

Their numbers were never large, but their effectiveness at guerrilla warfare forced the British to conclude a peace treaty with them in 1739, which guaranteed them land and some freedoms, including exemption from taxation. They were concentrated in two areas, around Trelawny Town and the Cockpit Country in the west part of the island (the Leeward Maroons); and around Nanny Town and the Rio Grande Valley in the east (the Windward Maroons).

The fear of a slave rebellion was never far from the minds of planters at the end of the eighteenth century. The French Revolution and with it, the calls for equality and liberty on the part of the negro and mulatto populations of the French colony of St Domingue (part of the future Haiti), followed by the destruction of a large part of the white population there in a slave uprising, was an example too close to hand. The British intervened in 1793-8, but withdrew leaving behind the negro troops they had brought with them from Jamaica lest they foment further unrest on their return; for there were disturbances involving the Maroon community in 1795. In response, Trelawny Town was captured and destroyed, and many Maroons were transported.

There were slave uprisings in various parts of the Caribbean in the early nineteenth century, in Demerara in 1823, on Jamaica at about the same time, on a small scale, and subsequently in 1831-2, in frustration at the opposition of the Jamaica House of Assembly to the adoption of the Orders in Council that would have ameliorated the position of slaves.

12 A description of the costs and charges on a typical Jamaica plantation of the 1780s, producing 200 hogsheads of sugar, or 16 cwt., and 130 puncheons of rum, of 110 gallons, worth £4,300 sterling on the London market; from the second volume of B. Edwards *The history, civil and commercial, of the British colonies in the West Indies* (2 vols., London, 1793)

[*Rare Books F2131 71-027454*]

13 Letter from Major General Sir J. Carmichael Smyth to the first Duke of Wellington (the Prime Minister) outlining his observations on the state of the slave population in the West Indies from his tour of the West Indies in 1824, 12 March 1828

[*MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/922/4*]

The whole of the slave population in the West Indies does not amount to 800,000; women and children included. About one half of them belong to Jamaica; the remainder are scattered over the other islands.

The island of Jamaica is in the most beautiful state of cultivation. We have no county in England beyond it; and I can faithfully assure Your Grace that the state of the labouring class is not at variance with the beauty of the romantic scenery with which they are surrounded. I not only saw no misery or wretchedness; but I everywhere witnessed a happy, a contented, I may say a merry population. I did not see a man who had not his shirt, trousers, smock-frock, shoes and hat. The women equally well taken care of. I remember particularly being struck at the time at meeting a party of about forty women going to work one morning before the sun was up, each woman having on a cloak of blue cloth to protect her against the early dew. On a Sunday men and women are dressed in a way which would be thought ridiculous finery in this county. In point of cloathing they have nothing to complain of. I was on horseback or in a gig every morning before day-break (whilst travelling about Jamaica) and I had constant opportunities of seeing the negroes at their work and at their meals. The work could not be hard for they were always singing. Their breakfasts and dinners were brought to them, in the field, by their children. They go home to their suppers which is their principal meal. In passing their cottages of an evening, the fiddle and the Jews' harp was always to be heard. On every estate there is an hospital; and those which I saw were superior in point of comfort and accommodation to the greater number of work-houses and

poor-houses in this country. I never saw an hospital without Venetian blinds, from which circumstance Your Grace may form some idea as to the care bestowed upon the sick slave. In the cottages of the artificers and better sort of slaves, more tumblers, decanters and glassware (of which things the negroes are remarkably fond, and proud of possessing) are to be met with than in any of the small secondary inns in this country. Upon the whole I can safely and conscientiously declare that I did not see a single human being at Jamaica who was an object of pity. I saw everywhere a sleek, well-fed, well-clothed, cheerful population; and when I contrast the state of these slaves (who are held up as a wretched and unhappy race by those who have never seen them) with the number of beggars and vagrants who are everywhere to be met with in this country in the most squalid poverty and misery, I have no hesitation in saying that as a whole, the labouring population at Jamaica is much better provided for than the labouring population of England ...

On the mainland, at the colonies of Berbice and Demarara, there are about 110,000 slaves. The situation of these people I conceive to be very different from the slaves at Jamaica. The greater number of the Berbice and Demarara slaves are negroes who have been imported from Africa during the war. They are well fed, for the country is most prolific, but they are almost naked — a handkerchief around the middle with men, and a very short petticoat for the women is, in general, all they have. The country is a low alluvial soil, which acted upon by a tropical sun produces a vegetation not to be surpassed. The coffee and cotton shrubs afford two crops every year; and the sugar cane is always ready to be cut, in succession. The profit to the planter is therefore very great; but the labour to the negroe is incessant. The nature of the country requires every field to be surrounded by a broad deep ditch; and every estate is separated from the next by a canal. The labour of making and keeping up these ditches and embankments is pretty heavy — nothing but the dread of severe punishment could have made the raw negroe undergo it.

When the insurrection took place in 1823 the negroes relying upon their numbers were foolish enough to attack the troops; and to think they could obtain possession of the town; whereas, had they contented themselves with burning the buildings or the estates and retired to the woods, they never could have been followed, and the colony would have been lost to Great Britain for all purposes of utility. I was very glad to observe that a protector of the slaves has been appointed at Demarara, which appointment from what I have described to Your Grace as the state of the slaves upon the mainland, would I should conceive do good. If this gentleman sees that the overseers and resident managers issue to the negroes the cloathes and other articles sent out by the proprietors and due to the slaves by law, he will allay a great deal of discontent.

Upon the whole, I take the liberty of respectfully observing to Your Grace that I left the West Indies with the impression that I had nowhere seen a more happy or more cheerful peasantry than than the slaves in Jamaica; that the slaves, generally, were very well attended to in the West Indies; but that at Demarara the labour was more severe and the comforts of the negroe were less than in the other colonies.'

14 Letter from Lieutenant Colonel C.F.Smith, Barbados, to Wellington, enclosing letters on the slave uprising in Demerara, 17 September 1823 [MS 61 *Wellington Papers* 1/771/10]

In a letter addressed to General Mann under date of the 14th Instant I had occasion to allude to the late revolt of the negroes at Demerara, and to General Murray's belief in the tranquillity of the coloured population in his colony, as expressed to me within a month of the rupture breaking out. In order, therefore, to shew that my observation was not the result of mere idle speculation, and to prove the secrecy with which black conspiracies can be carried on, I have taken the liberty of presuming to inclose for Your Grace's information copies of an official letter from me, to my officer at Demerara, which was laid before the governor, and of the reply written by His Excellency's desire. I also annex an extract from a private letter which refers to points that may not be officially noticed, as I understand General Murray is still incredulous as to the ramifications of the plot being extensive.

... The proceedings in the last session of Parliament certainly displayed a want of knowledge of the then state of the country, and it is those proceedings expounded by the Methodist missionaries and other malcontents, that have induced the West Indies to the present state of ferment. We have intelligence of the militia being on permanent duty in Grenada, and though Your Grace is well aware that I am no alarmist, I must be permitted to observe that I consider the safety of most of the colonies in a very precarious state. From local causes, this island and Antigua are the only points where troops could act with success, provided the coloured people were favoured with any degree of advantage in the onset.

15 Extract from a private letter from Lieutenant Alexander Gordon to the Commanding Engineer, Demerara, on the slave revolt there, 4 September 1823: contemporary copy
[MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/771/10]

The plot of this revolt was a most extensive one, as the river as well as town negroes were concerned; but the decisive blow to the east coast negroes has stopped its progress for the present. When you dined at this Residency, you might have observed the General's servant who waited upon him that day (by name Sam): he was to have taken the fort with his party. This man together with three more of the General's servants are in custody, his butler, a free-man, one of them. On the first alarm here of the rising of the negroes all the town fled on board of ship. There were 50 ladies and children on board of one ship ...

The evidences on the prisoners as well as the prisoners themselves, state that a Mr Smith, a parson, Mr Hamilton an overseer, have been the chief people in prompting them to this act of disobedience. Smith, Hamilton and Parson Elliot are in custody, and we are now most anxious to see them tried. I have only been one day on the court martial, at the expiration of which the General said he could not spare me from my own duties which were far more important. Mr Chapman sends the first Gazette (27th) which was published here, and I take the liberty of sending you the one of the 28th.

The Indians muster very well (about 200) and are destined for the bush to scour it and break up the bush negro camps, which in some places are formidable.

16 Letter from G.F. Young to the Duke of Wellington sending a petition opposing the immediate ending of slavery in the West Indies which he would like the Duke to present to the House of Lords, 25 February 1831
[MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/1176/17]

The petition of the undersigned manufacturers, traders, ship owners, and others concerned in the production and export from the Port of London of the various supplies required for the use of the British West India Colonies sheweth:

That your petitioners are deeply interested in the preservation and prosperity of the West India colonies many of them having large capitals embarked in their respective occupations whereby employment is afforded to thousands of industrious artizans, seaman, labourers, and others;

That it has therefore been with surprise and alarm that your petitioners have witnessed the attacks made throughout the country on all the interests connected with those colonies by the persevering efforts employed to obtain petitions to your Honorable House, praying for the immediate and unqualified emancipation of all the slaves in His Majesty's dominions

17 *Papers relating to captured negroes*, the return made by the Colonial Office in response to a request made by the House of Commons, 13 April 1824, with 'copies of all reports made by the Commissioners, or by either of them, who were appointed by His Majesty, in compliance with an address of the House, to inquire into the state of the Africans, who had been condemned to His Majesty under the Acts abolishing the slave trade, and who had been apprenticed, or otherwise disposed of, in the West Indies': a return of the state and condition of the Africans captured on board the Spanish ship *Venus*, captured by H.M.S. *Barbadoes*, under Commander John Fleming; condemned in the Vice Admiralty at Tortola (the Virgin Islands) 13 August 1814, when the Africans on board, amounting to 303 persons, were delivered to Francis Ingram, the Collector of H.M. Customs at Tortola.

[Rare Books: Parliamentary papers]

Case 3

Abolition: 1807

Despite considerable parliamentary support in 1792 — in that year the Commons resolved that the trade should be gradually abolished, concluding in 1796 — there were significant setbacks. The climate engendered by the outbreak of revolution in France and slave revolts, particularly in St Domingue (Haiti), a French colony, made the early 1790s unpropitious for the cause. There was some anxiety that the anti-slave trade movement was a cloak for sedition and radicalism, and there was a real concern at the destabilising effect that might be brought by abolition. Although these fears were allayed, the political climate at the turn of the century was not one fertile for the aspirations of the abolitionists. It was not until 1804-5 that the balance of interests in Parliament had shifted sufficiently far for Wilberforce to bring an abolition bill successfully through three readings in the Commons; but it proved too late in that parliamentary session for it to be taken through the House of Lords. Pitt was able to promote the cause of abolition in other ways: significantly, at this point, in September 1805, the government made an Order in Council which put an end to the slave trade in the former Dutch Guiana, a precursor of later orders managing the condition of slaves in the West Indian colonies. A procedural measure in mid-1806, designed to enable Parliament to confirm the Order in Council, passed both Houses; and on 10 June 1806 Fox, the leader of the government in the Commons, moved a resolution for the general abolition of the trade, which Lord Grenville (the Prime Minister) also moved in the House of Lords. An Abolition Bill followed in early 1807, receiving the royal assent on 25 March.

18 Substance of the debates on a resolution for abolishing the slave trade, which was moved in the House of Commons on the 10th June, 1806, and in the House of Lords on the 24th June, 1806 ... (London, 1806). The debate in the House of Lords, 24 June 1806: after nearly twenty years of debate in Parliament, Lord Grenville was able to move in the House of Lords the order of the day, the resolution of the House of Commons for the abolition of the African slave trade, which was passed by the Lords by 41 votes to 20. A further resolution was carried, as in the Commons, for an address to the Crown, to invite other powers to concert with Great Britain the best means for abolishing the slave trade.

[Rare Books HT1163 71-082480]

The progress of the cause beyond unilateral abolition

After 1807, there was continued pressure for further measures against slavery. Parliament increased the severity of penalties for British involvement in the slave trade: in 1811, a bill introduced by Brougham made it a felony, for which the punishment was transportation; and, from 1824, it was a capital offence. Other measures involved slave registration, to curb inter-island traffic in the West Indies, starting with the creation of a registry for Trinidad in 1812, and culminating in an Act of 1819 which established a central registry in London. Bilateral agreements were concluded with other powers, European, American and African, in order to bring the trade to a halt. This was a long process and little progress was made until after the defeat of Napoleon. Typical was the Treaty of Ghent, 24 December 1814, between Great Britain and the United States, which declared:

Whereas the traffic in slaves is irreconcilable with the principles of humanity and justice, and whereas both His Majesty and the United States are desirous of continuing their efforts

to promote its entire abolition, it is hereby agreed that both the contracting parties shall use their best endeavours to accomplish so desirable an object.

Not all countries believed that British altruism was a credible explanation for what was happening. Some alleged that motivation centred on British concern at the numbers of slaves, which, given unrest and rebellion, might have placed her colonial empire in jeopardy. That notwithstanding, work to suppress the trade continued in the international congresses that followed the Napoleonic wars. Thomas Clarkson was present to apply pressure at both the Congress of Paris in 1814 and the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818, and the theme was revisited at Verona in 1822.

The Congress of Verona

19 Draft of a letter from the first Duke of Wellington, to George Canning, the Foreign Secretary, reporting an interview he had in Paris with the Comte de Villèle on French action to put an end to the African slave trade, 21 September 1822. Wellington was the British plenipotentiary en route to the Congress at Verona.

[MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/724/19]

He said that he would not conceal from me the fact that the abolition of the slave trade was unpopular in France not because any value was attached to the colonies because he believed that there was a very general opinion in France that their colonies were useless to them; but because the abolition had been pressed upon the King by Great Britain; and he begged me to observe that the existing law for the abolition of the slave trade was the only law that had ever passed the legislature without discussion; no person having spoken either for or against it. That this silence upon it was not to be attributed to indifference to the subject; but to the sense entertained that the abolition had been forced upon the King, and that every measure to carry it into execution was a national disgrace.

20 Draft of a letter from Wellington to Canning on discussions at the Congress of Verona about the abolition of the slave trade and his ability to bring the powers at the Congress to a declaration that slave trading was piracy, 28 October 1822

[MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/732/7]

... The profits of the trade are such that the trade in slaves is still carried on by French subjects and by all nations under cover of the French flag. I think therefore that we are entitled by this state of the facts to call upon His Most Christian Majesty [the King of France] to perform his treaty; and upon our allies, parties to the treaty, to join with us in the measures which we shall adopt upon this subject. I am not certain that when we place the question on this ground it would not be best to leave to the French government to discover the measures which would be the most adviseable. But the concession of the mutual right of search being as I conceive out of the question, and the declaration of an opinion that slave trading ought to be made piracy hopeless, the following are the measures which I would recommend to the French government:

1st. The adoption of a strict registry of slaves in their colonies; which would prevent farther importations.

2ndly. The grant of the ship and [f. 8r] cargo of vessels taking slaves on board as prize to the captain of the king's ship which should capture such vessel.

3rdly The grant of head money to the captain in the same manner as is granted in the British service.

These measures can be adopted in France without any appeal to the legislature; but in addition the legislature should be applied to, to attach a *peine infamante* to the act of slave trading; of which the proof might be made to consist not alone in having slaves on board, but likewise in having on board those implements of coercion, and the other means of equipment and of fitting up the vessel which are the certain evidence of slave trading. Ships captured under such circumstances might as well as those captured having slaves on board be granted to the captain.

I think the allied ministers will not only consent to renew their general declaration of 1815 against the slave trade; but they will likewise join with us in keeping France either generally to perform her treaty or to adopt the

specified measures above referred to.

21 Wellington's memorandum on the slave trade, submitted to the session of the Congress of Verona held on 24 November 1822. This is one of the copies that was lithographed for circulation. It notes that the slave trade had increased since the declaration of the allies in Paris in 1815 against it. Portugal was the only country that permitted the trade to continue legitimately, but only in its own possessions and trading posts south of the Equator. It followed from this that all the trade that continued north of the Equator was prohibited by the laws of all European countries; but it continued as a contraband trade, generally carried out under a French flag: 'Toutefois ce commerce ne se fait point avec les précautions habituelles d'un commerce de contrebande. Il se fait généralement sous la protection du pavillon de France.' The reason for this was that France was the only one of the great maritime powers of Europe not to have joined in a treaty with Britain giving a right of search.

[MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/739/5/2]

22 The reply of the French ministers plenipotentiary at Verona, to Wellington's memorandum, c.25 November 1822. The French plenipotentiaries stressed their accord with other powers at the necessity of bringing the slave trade to a conclusion. At the same time they outlined the impossibility of the French agreeing to anything that allowed British naval forces to search French vessels, a dilemma that found no compromise until 1890.

[MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/739/5/3]

Réponse de Messieurs les Plénipotentiaires de France au Mémoire de Monsieur le Duc de Wellington relativement à la traite des nègres

Le mémoire dont Sa Grace le Duc de Wellington a donné connaissance au Congrès dans la séance du 24 de ce mois, a été pris en considération par les ministres plénipotentiaires de Sa Majesté Très Chrétienne [the King of France].

Ils commencent par déclarer que le gouvernement français partage toute la sollicitude du gouvernement britannique, pour faire cesser un commerce également réprouvé de Dieu et des hommes. Le nombre des esclaves africains transportés depuis quelques années dans les colonies, fût-il moindre que ne le calcule l'Angleterre, il serait toujours beaucoup trop grand. L'accroissement de la souffrance des victimes d'une infâme cupidité, inspire une profonde horreur. Les nations chrétiennes ne feront jamais trop d'efforts pour effacer la tache que la traite des nègres a imprimée à leur caractère, et on ne saurait trop louer le zèle que l'Angleterre a mis dans la poursuite de ses desseins bienfaisans.

Mais si les puissances alliées sont d'accord sur la question morale et religieuse; si elles font des vœux unanimes pour l'abolition de la traite des nègres, cette abolition renferme des questions de fait qui ne sont pas d'une égale simplicité. Les ministres de Sa Majesté Très Chrétienne vont les parcourir en suivant le mémoire présenté par Sa Grace le Duc de Wellington.

Toutes les lois des nations civilisées, le Portugal excepté, prohibent aujourd'hui la traite des nègres; il s'ensuit que ce crime autrefois légal est devenu un crime illégal et qu'il est doublement condamné par la nature et par les lois.

Selon le mémoire anglais, cette détestable contreband d'hommes est surtout exercée sous le pavillon français, soit que ce pavillon flotte sur des vaisseaux appartenant à la France, soit qu'il protège des bâtimens étrangers.

Des pirates peuvent arborer des couleurs respectables; la France ignore si quelques brigands n'ont point emprunté les siennes; ce ne sera jamais qu'à son inscu, que le déshonneur et le crime trouveront un abri sous le pavillon français. ...

... La constitution que Sa Majesté Très Chrétienne a octroyée à son peuple, abolit la confiscation; quant au droit de visite, si le gouvernement français pouvait jamais y consentir, il aurait les suites les plus funestes; le caractère national des deux peuples, français et anglais, s'y oppose; et s'il était besoin de preuves à l'appui de cette opinion, il suffirait de rappeler, que cette année même, en pleine paix, le sang français a coulé sur les rivages de l'Afrique. La France reconnaît le liberté des mers pour tous les pavillons étrangers, à quelque puissance

légitime qu'ils appartiennent; elle ne réclame pour elle, que l'indépendance qu'elle respecte dans les autres, et qui convient à sa dignité.

Case 4

The process of abolition: the 1820s

The formation in 1823 of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Improvement of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions, popularly known as the Anti-Slavery Society, assured continued public interest in the cause in Britain. Its establishment defined two contrasting approaches: 'gradualism', the Anti-Slavery Society's aspiration, seeking an on-going amelioration of the position of the slaves, a stance criticised by those who believed this was in the interest of the plantation owners in the colonies; and 'immediatism', favoured by those who wanted an immediate end to slavery — a position which drew together the younger and more radical supporters of the cause, especially from the early 1830s.

Through the 1820s, the British government put in place practical measures to assist slaves, to address the questions of compensation of slave-owners. Progress could also be made through administrative measures; Orders in Council could direct local governors, where they had authority, to advance reform in colonies; elsewhere colonial legislatures might be encouraged to adopt measures that ameliorated the position of the slaves. The government of the first Duke of Wellington, 1828-30, made a number of direct contributions to this end. The Royal Navy might also be employed more effectively to enforce the ban on the slave trade.

The case for compensation

23 Resolutions of the Standing Committee of West India Planters and Merchants, about compensation following emancipation of their slaves, as submitted to the government 21 November 1823

[*MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/776/5*]

Whatever may be the abstract right of the slave to his freedom, it cannot affect in the case before us the title of the master to compensation. "In the question of compensation the slave is no party — that question lies wholly between the proprietor and the legislature which has constituted the property — the last must be binding at least in those who made it. If the legislature with a view to national advantage has committed injustice and now, with a view to national justice, would repair the wrong, it is for the nation to pay the price of its wrong and not for the individual who acted in conformity to the law." If therefore the government or the Parliament adopt measures injurious to the property of the planters — a property which cannot be estimated at less than 150 millions — in which not only the fortunes of the planters are involved, but the interests of widows, children, annuitants and mortgagees to an enormous amount, the government and the Parliament are bound to provide without delay a fund which may be adequate to afford compensation.

Preventing the trade

24 Draft of a letter from Wellington to Lord Bathurst, arguing against sending a detachment of artillery to the African coast, outlining the failure of British posts there to prevent the slave trade, 4 July 1826

[*MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/858/17*]

[‘But supposing these measures cannot be relinquished and others cannot be adopted better calculated to produce an effect, and less costly, the question] is whether it is necessary to keep up the establishments on the

coast of Guinea and particularly Cape Coast Castle. Of all the establishments these are the most expensive and the most unhealthy.

They were originally established with a view to enable H.M.'s subjects to carry on the slave trade and they have since been delivered over to the government by the African Company in order the better to enable H.M. government to prevent other nations from carrying out that traffick.

It is quite obvious that these settlements cannot produce that effect; and that no settlement or fort upon that open coast equally accessible at all points can produce such an effect. Indeed it appears that those entrusted with the conduct of H.M.'s affairs in that part of the world very soon found that the purchase of negroes in that part of Africa by foreigners could not be prevented by these military posts; and they made use of them for the purpose of protecting some of what are called the native governments in that part of Africa against the oppression of others; and thus by the acquirement and exercise of a political influence to prevent the sale of slaves. That system has however failed entirely. The Ashantees have proved themselves too powerful for the neighbouring tribes event when protected and sustained by H.M.'s naval and military forces in his posts on the coast of Guinea; and [it will be found that on the one hand whenever His Majesty's forces take the field the same disasters will occur and the same disgrace will be incurred as in the year 1824, and on the other that the Ashantees will be unable to deprive H.M. troops of the posts upon the coast until they will be assisted by Europeans or Americans in the attack of them.

The posts then upon the coast can never be of any use excepting as fixed stations; and as fixed stations upon an open accessible coast they can be of none to prevent the purchase of negroes; and the political influence which H.M.'s Governor General in Africa may have enjoyed for the moment must be annihilated by the destruction of the governments and people whom he endeavoured to protect.]

The colonies and the emancipation of slaves: the Wellington government

25 Letter from Sir George Murray, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, to Wellington on a despatch he is preparing for the governors in the West Indies on the subject of slavery, 19 August 1828

[MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/948/11]

I am now employed in preparing a communication to the several governors of the West India colonies on the subject of the slave question, and I shall submit it to your consideration as soon as it is finished. It is very important, and I am convinced it is for the interest of all the parties concerned, that the government should be allowed to manage this question in its own way. The general view I take of the matter is — that we should endeavour strongly to impress upon the West Indian body the necessity of doing something; but that we should not prescribe particularly and dogmatically the measures which they are to adopt. It may be very well that in the Crown colonies we should enforce, to a certain extent, such specific measures as appear to us to be useful and practicable, because these may be considered as not an improper field for experiment, but, in the colonies which have legislatures we are more likely to make progress, I think, by letting these legislatures work in their own way, provided they shew a disposition to make some progress in carrying into effect the general principles laid down by the resolution of the British Parliament upon the subject, than by dictating specific measures for their adoption.

26 Copy of a letter from Wellington to Murray about instructions to the governors in the West Indies, the slave trade and the colonies in Africa, 20 August 1828: contemporary copy

[MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/951/14]

I have received your letter. I quite concur with you in principle that we must not endeavour to force the colonial legislatures. But we must consider the Order in Council as the standard to which legislation for the amelioration of the slave population ought to tend; and inculcate that principle in our correspondance with the governors; pointing out to them the mode which each ought to pursue to induce the legislature of the colony under his government to adopt some measures in the same view.

He ought to point out to them particularly how desireable it is to the colony that the question should be kept in the hands of the government and of the colonial legislature instead of being taken up by Parliament; and that this object can be attained only by the colonial legislature taking an enlarged view of the case, and adopting something effectual.

In respect to Jamaica the object must be to prevail upon the Assembly to separate from the slave law that part of the Act of the last session of the Assembly which tended to regulate matters of religion. It was to this part that Huskisson objected. If we can besides get them to do anything more, so much the better.

It was I who proposed that the garrisons on the coast of Africa should be exclusively naval. I made this proposal because it was so easy for the navy to supply them with good food, and to relieve them occasionally in case of sickness. I believe that the expence would have been greater; but the mortality would have been smaller.

In the meantime it was proposed to occupy Fernando Po; and the Lord High Admiral who is not an economist undertook the affair; and I believe that the candle has been burning at both ends. But we must look at this whole question. I believe that besides what the liberated Africans cost us, which I admit must still be expended, we expend so much that the interest of the sum amounts to more than the whole value of the trade, import as well as export; that is to say twenty times the value of all the trade in every year. Our settlements on the coast of Africa therefore are an expensive appendage.

Orders in Council

27 Memorandum by Wellington to Murray on the manumission of slaves in Berbice, 31 May 1829. Wellington's pencil draft has been inked over by his private secretary, on making out a fair copy.

[*MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/1022/26*]

I think the original draft is fair as between slave owner and slave who wishes to obtain manumission by purchase; if the principle of property in the slave is admitted at all.

I would recommend then that the ordinance should not be altered.

But if the ordinance is to be altered I should say that the alteration ought to contain a clear enumeration of a distinction between domestick duties and field labour by a slave; and of the opinion that the owner ought to have the full and fair allowance for the attainments of his slave in the one or the other line of life; more particularly if he should be an artificer or qualified to carry on any particular branch of business necessary for the prosperity of the plantation.

In respect to number 2, the question is this: what is the nature of the property which the law allows the slave to possess independantly of his master? Is it limited in amount? Is the owner of the slave in any way connected with it?

According to the Dutch laws I believe that a slave had no property. Everything that he had was the property of his owner; as his offspring are from generation to generation.

If this be the law still or there is any limitation or modification of the right of the slave to possess property whether moveable or immoveable we cannot with justice allow him to purchase his free manumission without throwing upon him the proof that he possesses honestly the means of making that purchase. We must particularly require proof that the money has not been given by a third party.

Number 3: I think that the slave desiring manumission should be required to prove that he has conducted himself honestly and faithfully, independently of all other matter.

Upon the whole of this subject I beg to observe that we are proceeding to deprive H.M.'s subjects of a property which they have enjoyed under the repeated sanction of the legislature for nearly two centuries.

We have been called upon to adopt the principle of these measures by the resolutions of the two Houses of Parliament. But the mode of carrying into execution the principle must be our own; and we must take care to avoid as much as possible the violation of any principle of justice in everything that we shall order.

If we are to lose these colonies let us take care as a government to be in the right; and not by our act to give ground for any resistance which might lead to such a misfortune.

28 Memorandum by Wellington to Murray on the proposed Order in Council on slavery and the colonies, 10 October 1829

[*MS 61 Wellington Papers 1/1054/20*]

Clause marked 33 respecting the presumption in favour of the liberty of the slave

I think this is as unjust a provision as I have ever perused. In general the party claiming a benefit labours under the difficulty of proving the right to it. The slave or his protector could have no difficulty in proving his title to freedom if it was a good one. The owner having purchased the slave from another might experience

great difficulty in being able to prove that the mother or grandmother had not been manumitted. But this is not all. Is the sale of negroes now prohibited in the colonies? If it is not how is a man to tell whether he purchases a slave, or a manumitted slave, or a man whose mother or grandmother had been manumitted and their posterity therefore freeborn. I am afraid that we shall by adopting this clause depart from a principle of justice, of which we do not see the consequences.

Clause marked 35 That all persons may manumit slaves belonging to them
Is it not the custom to require that those who manumit slaves should provide for their subsistence in case they should by want of work or disinclination to work come upon the parish? If it is, this clause ought to be amended by requiring that all persons manumitting slaves should give such security.

Testamentary manumission
The 37th clause ought to be omitted for the same reason.

29 'Elevation and plan of an improved sugar mill, by Edward Woollery, Esquire, of Jamaica': plate from B.Edwards *History of the British West Indies ... with a continuation to the present time* (5 vols., and plates, London, 1818-19)
[Rare Books F2131 52-045439]

Case 5

Abolition: 1830 to 1865, and beyond

The Jamaican House of Assembly and the West Indian planters overplayed their hand in failing to embrace the Orders in Council. In 1833 the British Parliament passed legislation to emancipate the slaves of the British West Indies, and the Jamaica House of Assembly adopted the Act with considerable ill grace, rather than lose its share of the £20 million compensation that had been provided for slave owners. The institution of slavery was thereby abolished in the British West Indies, with compensation for slave owners — but not for slaves. Apprenticeship systems effectively delayed economic changes in the plantation systems. Further pressure, particularly from Daniel O'Connell and Joseph Sturge, brought apprenticeship to an end in 1838.

Slavery had not been abolished outside the British empire. Anti-slavery societies, the British government, the Royal Navy, enforcing anti-slavery conventions, and the governments of other Western powers continued to work for general abolition into the second half of the nineteenth century. Cases of British subjects in slavery continued to cause widespread outrage, a litmus test of the commitment of government to abolition of slavery wherever it occurred. A guide for naval officers set out for them the legal framework that was created for abolition, listing some twenty-seven groups of treaties, conventions, engagements and declarations from 1817 to 1842, with European and American states, and African kingdoms and chiefdoms. Putting this into operation was complex. By about 1865, however, very substantial progress had been made; the trade to South America was largely stopped. If the British government had been able to make progress by compensating its slave owners, however, the United States faced a much larger problem; and without a central government that was able to resolve the issue, the ordeal of civil war almost destroyed the country. The Atlantic trade abolished, the British government turned from the 1870s onwards to the trade from the east coast of Africa. The European powers came together in Brussels in 1889-90 and their conference produced a general act suppressing the trade, not only at sea, but also

within Africa.

30 Letter from Sidney Fowell Buxton to the third Viscount Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary, about a motion he was to introduce into the House of Commons the following day, and asking to see Palmerston beforehand. Buxton noted his intention to attack Portugal for violation of treaties, and urged Palmerston to endure it no more; to remark on the defective geographical boundaries of the treaty with France, which needed correction; and to argue 'that all treaties must be nugatory till by a combination of the civilised nations it [slavery] is declared piracy and I shall labour to convince you and the House that the accomplishment of such a measure is not hopeless'. 29 May 1837

[MS 62 Palmerston Papers SLT/8]

31 Notes prepared in the Foreign Office for Lord Palmerston 'Shewing what has been done about slave trade since last year', responding to the points in Foxwell Buxton's letter, 30 May 1837

[MS 62 Palmerston Papers SLT/9]

32 Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton *The African slave trade and its remedy* (London, 1840). The volume, issued in two parts, describing the African slave trade in 1839, and, the following year, its remedy, outlined the continuation of the slave trade, and its growth, particularly to South America, especially under the Portuguese flag.

[Rare Books HT 1321 71-027155]

33 *Instructions for the guidance of Her Majesty's naval officers employed in the suppression of the slave trade* (London, 1844)

[Rare Books HT1162 71-082547]

A guide for naval officers, containing instructions for dealing with British subjects, for foreigners seized on slave vessels in British waters, and for every other case covered by treaty, convention or agreement. The volume contains the text of all the treaties, with instructions on how to proceed in each case. Official caution was needed in international relations to restrain the zeal of individuals for a popular cause. For example, in the case of ships of the Argentine Confederation, the authority to visit and search had to take account of a number of restrictions:

First. Search is to be made only by you, or by an officer of your ship, not under the rank of Lieutenant in the Navy, unless he be second in command in your ship.

Secondly. The right of search can only be exercised with respect to merchant-vessels.

Thirdly. If you should suspect that an Argentine merchant-vessel under convoy of an Argentine ship of war is engaged in the slave trade, you are to communicate such suspicions to the commander of the convoy, and offer to accompany him on the search to be made. The commander of the convoy, accompanied by you, is to proceed to search the suspected vessel; and if the suspicion appear well founded, the vessel is to be taken by the commander of the convoy to one of the mixed courts of justice established under the treaty.

Should the commander of the convoy omit to fulfil the conditions of the treaty, you have no authority to take any further steps.

34 Copy of the opinion of J.Dodson, given to Lord Aberdeen, the Foreign Secretary, about British naval activity and the suppression of the slave trade on the coast of Africa, at the Gallinas, New Cestos, and Sea Bar: 'The conduct of Governor Doherty [of Sierra Leone] in urging the interposition of Commander Denman on behalf of the woman and child, free

British subjects detained at the Gallinas and the very spirited and able conduct of that officer in rescuing them from slavery is certainly much to be commended; but I scarcely think that the blockading rivers, landing and destroying buildings and carrying off persons held in slavery in countries with which Great Britain is not at war, can be considered as sanctioned by the law of nations or by the provisions of any existing treaties with which I am acquainted; and, however desirable it may be to put an end to the slave trade, an eminent good should not be obtained otherwise than by lawful means.' 8 April 1842: contemporary copy
[MS 62 Palmerston Papers SLT/18]

35 Answer from Palmerston to the address from the Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society, 18 October 1842: 'Much has already been accomplished and much more may I trust be looked for. The Brazilians the Spaniards and the Portuguese are the great offenders and if they could be induced in good faith to give up the slave trade, our object as far as the slave trade is concerned would in a great measure be accomplished.'
[MS 62 Palmerston Papers SLT/19]

36 Draft of the 'Aberdeen Act', 'An Act to amend an Act, intituled An Act to carry into execution a convention between His Majesty and the Emperor of Brazil, for the regulation and final abolition of the African Slave Trade', as prepared and submitted to the Queen's Advocate, 30 June 1845 (amending the act of 1826)
[MS 62 Palmerston Papers SLT/25]

37 Notes for a speech made by Palmerston, while in opposition, c.1845-6, on the attitude of the Conservative government to the slave trade, with particular reference to British subjects enslaved in Surinam
[MS 62 Palmerston Papers SLT/26]

The apathy of the government, its indifference to the miseries of the negroes, its ready acquiescence in all the arrangements of foreign governments to cause delay and a just evasion, its eagerness to catch at every pretext for refusing to interfere to produce liberty for British subjects or even fair and real inquiry into their cases.

Plenty of querulous complaint of statement how ill we are used, little or no energetic measures for obtaining redress.

What signifies it to the government whether the British subjects linger in Surinam under the torments and tortures of illegal slavery; they revel in courtly luxury and only beg that their repose may not be disturbed by the narration of disagreeable and disgusting details.

It would be mercy to slaves at Surinam to be protected by law from cruelty as dumb animals are in England.

Power is valuable only for its employment, and cannot conceive any pleasure greater than employment of power to put an end to the slave trade.

Government ought not to rest till every British subject now held in slavery is set free.

I utterly repudiate doctrine of Queen's Advocate.

Every British subject ought to be free, and those who detain them in slavery do so at their perils and it is the duty of the British government to set them free despite all the Queen's Advocates in the world.

38 Letter from Stratford Canning, the British ambassador at Constantinople, to Palmerston on Ottoman actions against the slave trade, 3 January 1851
[MS 62 Palmerston Papers GC/CA228]

I am glad to learn from your slave trade dispatch number 9 that you are pleased with the Grand Vizir's instruction prohibiting the embarkation of slaves in Ottoman ships. Allow me, however, to say that the Porte [the Ottoman government] is little deserving of the thanks of Her Majesty's government on the occasion. Its

conduct was shuffling, and I found a great reluctance to make the required concession. It was finally by referring to the Sultan that I carried the point, and to him therefore I propose to make known your satisfaction. In general, notwithstanding the policy of Reschid's government and his personal good qualities I find the greatest difficulty in making any progress of consequence, whether the object be one of administrative improvement, of public works, or of commercial progress.

39 Estimate of the number of slaves introduced into Brazil during each year from 1826 to 1863 as far as can be ascertained from the records of the Foreign Office, August 1864. None had been imported into Brazil since 1855.

[MS 62 Palmerston Papers SLT/36]

40 *Speeches of the Right Hon. the Earl of Carlisle, Edward Baines, Esq., Wm. E. Forster, Esq., and other gentlemen at the annual meeting of the Leeds Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society, in the Town Hall, Dec. 28, 1858* (Leeds, 1859)

[Rare books HT1163 71-079417]

The continuation of slavery in the United States, long after that country had abolished the trade, was an especial focus of indignation.

p. 5 The Mayor briefly addressed the meeting ... The plain facts had been laid before them: that in America, they not only countenance slavery in its vilest form, but that they also sustained a colony for the breeding of slaves in the same manner as they would breed cattle and sheep in this country. He knew this to be a fact, for he had visited America, and he knew that in Maryland and Virginia these things were matters which might be witnessed by daily observation.

p. 16 Mr W.E. Forster then moved the next resolution, which was as follows: 'That so long as the Free States of America continue to aid the Slave States to keep in bondage from three to four millions of their fellow citizens, we must consider the American Union to be the stronghold of negro slavery; and that we therefore deeply deplore that a nation of our own race, and language, and religion, and bound to us by so many ties of common interest and sympathy, should be thus the chief upholder of this destructive and sinful system.'

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Further information about the collections

The manuscript collections are described in two guides by C.M.Woolgar and K.Robson: *A guide to the archive and manuscript collections of the Hartley Library: MSS 1-200* (Southampton: University of Southampton Library, 1992) and *A guide to the archive and manuscript collections of the Hartley Library: MSS 201-300* (Southampton, University of Southampton Library, 2000). The guides, with information about additional material and more recent accessions, and detailed catalogues of some of the collections, are available on the Special Collections website, at <http://www.archives.lib.soton.ac.uk/>. The printed collections are described in the Library's main on-line public access catalogue, WebCat, at <http://www.soton.ac.uk/library/>. The websites contain information about arrangements for access to the collections and opening times.