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The Spirit of Wilberforce
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Centre for Contemporary Ministry

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Report of the Visit of the Slave Ship *The Zong* to London 29 March - 9 April 2007 to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade

Vision Fulfilled

It is hard to find words to express our gratitude to God and our thanks to all of you who made it possible for CCM, under the '*Free at Last?*' banner, to bring the replica slave ship into London and open it to the public over the Easter period. In spite of only setting up a new team and commissioning the slave ship at the start of the year it was a success above all we could ask or imagine. It not only fulfilled the '*Spirit of Wilberforce*' vision that we were originally given but it more than surpassed it by opening up amazing opportunities for getting the Gospel into the heart of London.

Reaching London with the Gospel



It was always our intention to use the slave ship project for evangelism. Several of our prayer partners had sent us similar word/pictures about Tower Bridge opening and the glory of the Lord coming into London. We held a training day for our volunteers urging them to talk to members of the public about the faith of the Abolitionists and to use it to talk about the need for similar faith today. We produced an evangelistic booklet '*Winds of Change*', based upon the exhibition, that was given to everyone who came to visit the ship and also handed it out to hundreds of others during



those ten days. We will probably never know how many people came to faith as a result of this project but we do know that more than one thousand asked to receive further information about our ministry and gave us a contact address. This is many more than we anticipated but each one is being followed up.

Perhaps the most remarkable outcome, that may have far-reaching effects, involved the Mayor of London, **Mr Ken Livingstone**, and the Greater London Authority. Back last autumn we had several meetings with senior officials in the Mayor's Office seeking their help and cooperation in bringing the ship into London. It was made clear to us that their cooperation depended upon our not emphasising the role of Wilberforce or the Christian faith. We could not agree to this although it meant refusing the £50,000 on offer.

God's Overruling

We were understandably hesitant about inviting the Mayor to do the official welcome when the ship came into London. But we need not have worried for the Lord was already at work. The top official who had shown such hostility to the Gospel a month earlier had just given his life to the Lord! (He has subsequently invited Cliff to speak to a conference that he is organising). A few days later at a meeting in the GLA we discovered three more of the Mayor's staff and close advisers who are committed Christians.

Baroness Caroline Cox, **Mr Alistair Burt**, the Mayor and Cliff all spoke at the opening ceremony which was held down in the cargo hold of the ship surrounded by evidence of the cruelty and inhumanity of the slave trade with its manacles and chains. Mr Livingstone was clearly moved by the experience as he stood listening to **Dr Agu Irokwu**, who pastors the largest of the African churches in London, leading in prayer. Cliff spoke to the Mayor about the love of Jesus and up on deck he listened intently to the singing of *Amazing Grace* and said that it was the first time he had ever listened to all the words of John Newton's famous hymn.



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Pastor Agu took the opportunity of inviting the Mayor to an all-night prayer vigil for London that he was organising in Docklands. Mr Livingstone accepted and later that month he joined 38,000 Christians in a time of praise and worship listening intently to the speakers and joining in the singing. He was given the opportunity of speaking and he quoted the Bible and publicly committed himself to doing all within his power to promote the Christian faith in London.

He repeated that commitment several times and then allowed the leader of the prayer meeting to pray for him. He stayed until 1:30 a.m. and then went to the youth prayer meeting where 5,000 young people were praying and praising the Lord.

Cliff and Matt will be meeting with him soon, together with some of the African and Afro-Caribbean church leaders, to discuss the possibility of having the ship in London as a permanent commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade. We also plan to take a similar group to Downing Street to talk about the legacy of slavery.

Media Coverage



On 13 March Cliff and Matt went to Gloucester where the ship was in dry dock to film a piece for ITV News which went out in London on 19 March. The Ship Commissioning Service at Charlestown Cornwall was filmed by both BBC and ITV and broadcast by radio and TV in the West Country and in London. It also went out nationally on BBC One TV in the 'Heaven and Earth' programme.

A number of other networks (British and overseas) had programmes that featured the slave ship, its arrival in London and welcome by the Mayor. Mr Livingstone was seen coming on board and cutting a chain across the entrance to the lower deck of the newly named 'The Zong' to welcome the ship to London. This was covered by ITV and BBC News, by Channel 4 and Channel 5 as well as by Fox News in the USA and other TV network. Members of the team gave numerous interviews for radio programmes.

The story was carried in the press with numerous video clips on U-Tube and on websites including our own. DVDs are available both for sale and as complimentary versions.

Cornwall and Greenwich

About 300 Christians attended a Commissioning Service prior to the departure of the ship from its base at Charlestown Cornwall on Tuesday 20 March. This was led by the **Revd David Hull**, chairman of 'Love Cornwall' and brought together Christians from many of the churches that had supported this evangelistic outreach coming out of *The Sharing Show*, a CCM project first promoted at the *Christian Resources Exhibition* in 2006. A contingent from the Royal Navy at Plymouth, including the naval chaplain and Commodore, came to take part in dedicating the ship for its mission to London. **Pastor Wale Babatunde**, leader of *World Harvest*, a church on the Old Kent Road London, gave an inspiring message.

On Wednesday 28 March the ship arrived at Greenwich where the exhibition was put on board and the following morning a mixed ethnic, age and gender choir plus media reporters and cameramen also boarded for the final part of the journey up the Thames. *HMS Northumberland* led the way through Tower Bridge into the Pool of London as a re-enactment of the way it would have escorted a captured ship caught transporting slaves after the abolition of the trade on 25 March 1807.



Exhibition



Over a 10-day period nearly 10,000 people visited the exhibition of 'Slavery Past and Present'. Much of the success of the event was due to **Matt Buttery**, the Project Manager, who worked tirelessly to turn vision into reality. Many people commented upon the high professional standard of the exhibition designed by **Richard Oliver**. The first part was a general historical introduction based at All Hallows by the Tower. The second part involved parties of up to 50 being escorted down Tower Hill to Tower Pier accompanied by three of the 124 volunteers who served the ministry in this project. Each party boarded a specially hired 50 seater ferry for the short journey to where the slave ship (renamed *The Zong* after the most notorious of the 18th-century slavers) was moored close to Sugar Pier.

Following a short talk on the upper deck each party went below to see something of the conditions under which slaves were transported from West Africa to the Caribbean in the 18th-century. Most members of the public found it a very moving experience and those whose ancestors came from the Caribbean islands were

often deeply affected. Members of our team were on hand to talk with them and there were many hundreds of meaningful conversations that gave opportunities to the volunteers to share their faith in the Lord Jesus.

The final part of the exhibition was in the restaurant area at All Hallows. This showed the work of Abolitionists - William Wilberforce, Olaudah Equiano, Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp, Hannah More, Henry Thornton and John Newton. It also focused on the legacy of slavery and some of the modern forms of slavery such as people trafficking, sex slavery and drugs that enslave people today.



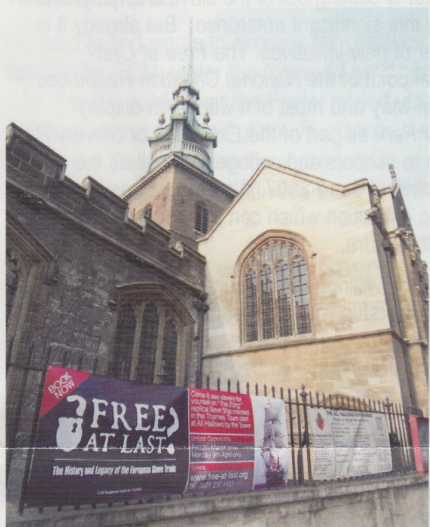
Evening Seminars

A series of evening seminars was organised by **Dr Theo Willcocks** taking place with invited guests on the upper deck of The Zong on subjects related to slavery past and present. These were addressed by a number of outstanding speakers with expert knowledge who formed a panel for questions and discussion after each had spoken. The seminar topics were "*The Legacy of Slavery*", "*Slavery Today*" and "*Following the Example of Wilberforce*". They made a significant contribution to the whole event and opened up a number of avenues for creative social action in which Christians can take a leading part in the future.

Maundy Thursday

Thursday 5 April was a poignant moment down in the cargo hold of the slave ship with the reminders of cruelty and suffering all around us when we thought of the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples. It was a time of lamentation and solemn reflection with readings and prayers followed by a meaningful act of love and unity up on the main deck where with bowls of water and towels, black and white, African, English and Caribbean, we washed one another's feet and celebrated our oneness in Jesus our Saviour.

All Hallows by the Tower



The church at *All Hallows by the Tower* contributed significantly to the success of the project by providing a base for the whole enterprise, a meeting point for the public and accommodation for the largest section of the exhibition. The church building, is the oldest in the City of London being older than the Tower and having considerable historical links with the River Thames and its mercantile fleet. The vicar, the **Rev Bertrand Olivier** and the verger, **Terry Barber**, not only showed great patience and flexibility in the preparation stages for the exhibition but participated fully in the event when it started.

The church allowed us to take over most of their ancillary premises for two weeks which included the Easter period with its additional services. The final service of thanksgiving saw All Hallows full on Easter Monday evening. It was a joyful event organised by our CCM chairman, the **Rev Roger Whitehead**, which included contributions from **Bertrand Olivier**, **Dr Agu Irokwu**, **Pastor Wale** and **Precious Babatunde**, **George Verwer**, **Matt Buttery**, **Liz Doyle** and **Clifford Hill**.

Public Support

Before 'The Zong' opened to the public we were concerned that many from the Caribbean community might feel uncomfortable in visiting the slave ship due to its very painful associations. In fact, there was a strange reversal in the ethnic mix of public attendance. In

the first day or two 80% of visitors were white. By the third or fourth days the balance was about equal with African, Caribbean and white members of the public in equal proportions. But this gradually changed with considerably larger numbers from the Caribbean community coming so that on the last day they formed 80% of the visitors.

This was particularly remarkable since it was not the result of advertising but of word-of-mouth, as those who had come earlier in the week told their friends, or came back with their family. It was also from the Caribbean community that there was the major demand for the slave ship to be permanently based in London so that their children and future generations can gain a better understanding of their African roots.

Questionnaire and Survey

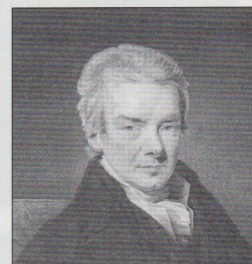
All members of the public who came to the exhibition were given a welcome leaflet with a 'before and after' questionnaire. The first half was completed on arrival and was designed to show how much knowledge each one had of 18th-century slavery and the abolition movement. The second half was completed at the end of the two-hour visit which was designed to show how much had been learned and reaction to the experience on board the ship.

The data from this questionnaire is still being analysed and a separate report of the survey results will be published. At the suggestion of the GLA, we organised a petition calling for the ship to be based in London as a permanent recognition of an important period in our British history and as a commemoration of the achievement of the Abolitionists. Most members of the public willingly agreed to sign the petition and many took copies to get additional signatures.

The GLA have offered to help us compile and produce a report using all this survey data which can be used to seek support and funding for the future of the project.

Website

An important part of the publicity for the slave ship project was the establishment of a web site specially dedicated to the *Spirit of Wilberforce* project and *Free at Last? Exhibition*. This is still available and has video clips showing the ship entering London as well as a considerable amount of information about the exhibition and the 18th-century abolition of the slave trade.



Staff and Volunteers

CCM engaged a number of additional staff to form a team dedicated to transforming the visit of the slave ship from vision to reality. **Matt Buttery** was seconded from the *Family Matters Institute* to be the Project Manager, ably assisted by **Charmaine Jelbert**, with **Richard Oliver** directing the design and installation of the exhibition, **Merissa Maciness** having general oversight of the media contacts and **Olave Snelling** overseeing radio and TV coverage. **Paul Clark** was the financial officer overseeing ticket reservations, budget and finance. **Ruth Adams**, **Angie Clark** and **Gillian Orpin** drew together the database and carded for the home office. **John Matthews** became training officer for volunteers, **Monica** was in charge of the recruiting and deployment of volunteers assisted by **Carol Freeman** took care of refreshments and the important task of feeding them and **Liz and Sid Doyle** and **Nori Chesney** who organised the day-to-day duties of the volunteers. **Theo Willcocks** with **Jenny Pollock** looked after the special evening events with **Roger Whitehead** looking after the services - and **Cliff** was the General Project Director. Additionally we drew in a number of professional groups for specialist help and we could not have done without all the volunteers (willing but unnamed) - over 124 of them!



Outcome and Future



It is truly amazing to see all that is coming out of the slave ship project and these are early days following this significant enterprise. But already it is opening the doors to a number of new initiatives. The *Free at Last? Exhibition* itself became a focal point of the *National Christian Resources Exhibition* at Esher in Surrey in **May** and most of it will be on display permanently at *Moggerhanger Park* as part of the *Exhibition of Slavery Past and Present* and will be open to schools and colleges as well as the general public from the beginning of **June 2007**. We are also responding to a great demand for a travelling exhibition which can be mounted around the country both this year and in the future.

We are greatly encouraged by the willingness of African and Afro-Caribbean Christian leaders to work in partnership with us in setting up an educational project offering leadership training for young people as part of a programme to overcome the legacy of slavery for which we hope to get Government funding.

Back in the 1960s Cliff published a book entitled *'West Indian Migrants and the London Churches'* that pleaded for recognition of the great resource that was offered to our churches through the fervour and commitment of the large number of Christians who were coming to Britain from the Caribbean and from Africa. He quoted a man who said, "We want to feel that we belong to the churches in England. We want expressions on the part of white people that they are glad to have us; that we have something to contribute; that we can make the churches in this country stronger than they would be if we were absent." This man's wish is at last becoming a reality.

The current national debate on gun crime among young Afro-Caribbeans is giving a new urgency to the partnership of black and white Christians. The lack of fatherhood in many families in our inner-city communities is something that can only be effectively dealt with in a Gospel-based programme. This is where a creative project led by black and white church leaders can make a national impact and a number of consultations are in the planning stage.

For Cliff and Monica personally this is the fulfilment of a vision born out of their many years of work in inner-city London. They foresaw the day when African and Afro-Caribbean Christians would play a prominent part in the re-evangelisation of Britain. That day has been a long time coming but they believe the tide is turning and a partnership of black and white Spirit-filled believers brings the kind of unity that commands the blessing of the Lord and will bring an outpouring of new life to the land.



This report is one of a number on this theme and has been prepared for distribution with the CCM Mailing Spring 2007

Further copies are available from

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