

ROTHLEY AND THE ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

The mutual endeavours of Babington,
Gisborne, Wilberforce and Macaulay



With Foreword by
Professor James Walvin

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Behind every prominent politician there is usually a team or at least a couple of trusted lieutenants who help shape their leader's mind and actions. When William Wilberforce made his immense speeches at the crucial moments of the abolition debates in 1791 and 1792, he did not rely just on his own resources. Quartered with him at his London home were his two friends of college days at St John's Cambridge, Thomas Babington, squire of Rothley, Leicestershire, and Thomas Gisborne, squire of Yoxall Lodge, Staffordshire. In summer recesses at Rothley and Yoxall, the trio examined, tested, and summarised masses of slave trade evidence given to a committee of the House of Commons. In London the two squires helped Wilberforce marshal those summaries into the heads of those amazing speeches.

Then there is the incredible story of Zachary Macaulay, Babington's brother-in-law, who in between an upbringing in a Highland manse and turning up at Rothley in 1789 a near-broken man, spent five years overseeing the work of slaves in Jamaica. The profound change of heart under Babington's care, and the Babington connections in the evangelical movement, ushered Zachary into a lifetime career in the eventually successful anti-slavery cause. This book tells the story of those mutual endeavours which had their strong links with Rothley.

Terry Sheppard is a former Bursar of St John's Theological College, Nottingham, with an enduring interest in documenting the history of his local village of Rothley, Leicestershire.

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