

WHY HERE? WHY THEN?

THE ROLES OF JOHN AND THOMAS CLARKSON
IN THE ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE 1807



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*With thanks to Kath and Connor
for their help and encouragement.*

INTRODUCTION

By the Chairman of The Friends of Wisbech and Fenland Museum

The passing of the Slave Trade Act in 1807 was the culmination of over 20 years of hard work from a comparatively small group of people battling against often hidden vested interests. We know today it was just the start of a global effort to rid our world of injustice and prejudice.

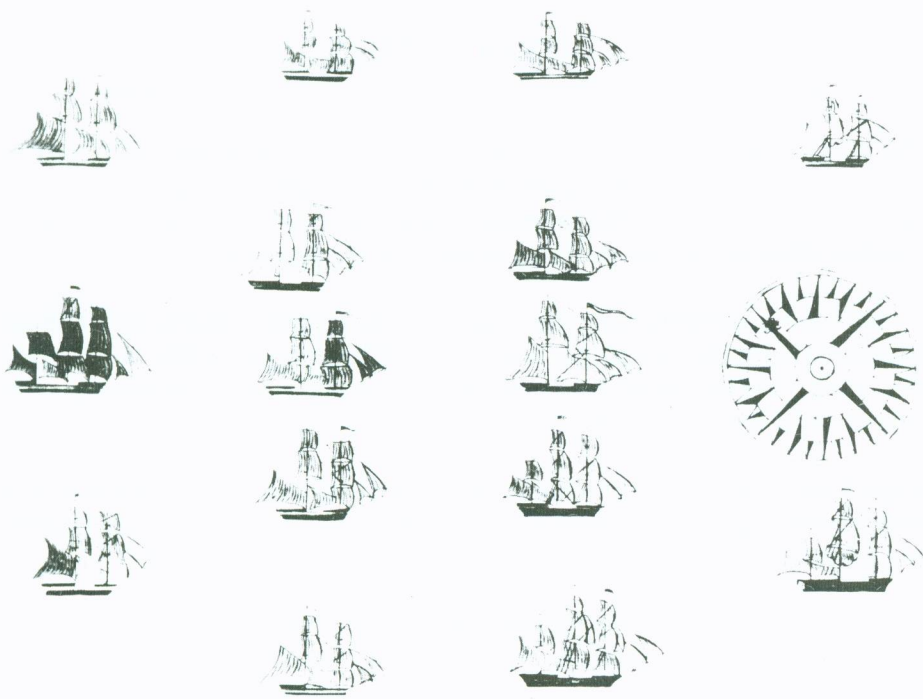
In 2007 we commemorate the magnificent, selfless efforts of all those associated with the campaign, and here in Wisbech we rightly wish to put into context the enormous contribution of our town's two most famous sons, Thomas and John Clarkson.

Roger Powell is to be commended for researching and writing this excellent booklet which gives a fascinating insight into the work carried out by Thomas and John, leading up to the momentous Act of Parliament in 1807.

I know you will find it compelling reading, and, perhaps, we should pause and reflect upon how things have progressed over the last 200 years.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Barnwell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Richard Barnwell



John Clarkson's drawing of his Nova Scotian fleet. The 'Lucretia' is seen top right.

WHY HERE? WHY THEN?

“Dear Sir, I am now under sail, with a fair wind and fine weather having on board 1192 souls in fifteen ships, all in good spirits, properly equipped and I hope destined to be happy.”

So wrote John Clarkson on 15th of January 1792 to Henry Thornton, head of the Sierra Leone Company and cousin of William Wilberforce. It was three hundred years after Columbus’ voyage which had opened the potential for the Atlantic Slave Trade and this fleet reversed the Trade’s direction, carrying Africans eastwards from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone. John Clarkson was anxious to obliterate all traces of the horrors of the Middle Passage in which millions of Africans had suffered and died. He chose smaller ships as they provided five foot height between decks, and he wrote in his journal: “We had so much more air for each individual to breathe in.” On vessels where there was a height of only four feet, he made the owners cut scuttles, ‘to give vent to the foul air.’ He issued a printed list of rules to all the ships’ masters. There were to be three daily sweeps of and between the decks. After breakfast the bed space of every passenger was to be scrupulously cleaned, and three times a week the lower decks were to be swabbed with vinegar scalded by a hot iron so that ‘steam might get into every crevice’ for effective fumigation. Provision was made for the regular airing of bedding and washing of clothes. The rules also insisted that the Africans be ‘considered as passengers who have paid the price demanded by the Owners for their accommodation’ The captains were to ensure that the Africans were treated respectfully and not subjected to ‘ill language and disrespect as is too often the case.’

The Africans in Nova Scotia had been slaves who had gained their freedom in return for fighting in the British army during the American War of Independence and after the British defeat in 1783, they had been shipped to Canada where they had settled in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. However, conditions were harsh and many promises made to them were not kept, so that their state was little better than slavery in the harsh wastes of eastern Canada. They learnt of a settlement that had been established in 1787 in Sierra Leone for impoverished Africans living in England. In November 1790 one of their number, Thomas Peters, arrived in London to plead that the Canadian Africans be allowed to go to Sierra Leone.

The choice of Sierra Leone for the settlement of free Africans was perhaps questionable as it lay close to the slaver base of Bance Island. It may be explained by two of the scheme’s proposers’ somewhat eccentric enthusiasm.

Jonas Hanway was one of the first people to use an umbrella in London, and he led campaigns against among other things - tipping cabbies and the 'pernicious custom' of drinking tea. His charitable works included the establishment of the Magdalen House for Penitent Prostitutes. There was also Henry Smeathman, known as 'Mr Termite' because of his great knowledge of ants and his advocacy of them as 'most delicious and delicate eating.' He had spent some time in Sierra Leone and he wrote to a friend that it had: "Pleasant scenes of vernal beauty, a tropical luxuriance, where fruit and flowers lavish their fragrance together on the same bough." He had also enjoyed the hospitality of the slave traders of Bance Island.

This first settlement of 1787 lacked the organisational skills and the racial equanimity that the Clarksons were later to bring to the Antislavery movement. One of the two men appointed as commissary to the expedition was the ex-slave, Olaudah Equiano. He was probably the first African to be appointed to an office by the British government, but he soon suspected his fellow commissary, Joseph Irwin, of flagrant abuses of the supplies. Irwin protested his innocence and Equiano was dismissed. Nevertheless he had a letter published in the *Morning Herald* on 4th January 1787 in which he wrote of the Africans: "Their poverty is made the pretence for their transportation... (they) are already subjected to a treatment and control, little short of the discipline of Guinea-men (slave ships)". As well as the Africans, there were a number of Europeans whose craft skills seemed largely superfluous as the Africans already possessed the same skills. There were also more than sixty European women who were wrongly thought to be wanton whores, an idea generated by prejudices against mixed race relationships.

On 10th May, the expedition arrived in Sierra Leone, and it was soon to be the rainy season which denied the settlers the opportunity to plant crops. Also there was not the promised allocation of land to the Africans. Some settlers, both European and African, fled to Bance Island where they took up the practice of slavery. In November 1789, the local Temne chief, King Jimmy, burnt the settlement of Granville Town to the ground and the first attempt to establish a home for freed slaves in Africa was in ruins.

Three years later, on 6th March 1792, twenty seven year old Lieutenant John Clarkson arrived in Sierra Leone with his convoy of fifteen ships from Nova Scotia after a voyage of 52 days. Born in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, on 4th April 1764, John was the younger brother of Thomas, and as the younger son of a schoolmaster's widow, a career in the Royal Navy was chosen for him. Almost 13, he joined HMS *Monarch* as a cadet. His captain was Joshua Rowley

who was a neighbour of John's mother's relations at Horkesley Park in Essex. During the American War of Independence John served on nine ships defending the West Indies. Here he must have witnessed the harsh realities of slavery but we have no record of his reaction or feelings on the question. Perhaps the harsh discipline practised in the Navy inured him to the treatment of slaves, or perhaps it sowed the seeds for his later antislavery campaigning.

With the end of the American War in 1783, John became one of nearly 1200 lieutenants on half-pay of around £90 a year and with little chance of gaining another posting. Two years later, Thomas became involved with the cause of Antislavery and his brother became his enthusiastic helper. John once had a conversation with the opponent of abolition, the Bishop of Bangor and former vicar of Wisbech, Dr John Warren. "My Lord, what makes you so angry with these poor black people?" asked John. To which the bishop replied: "O, they are a disagreeable set of people. They have such ugly noses." This was met with the very Clarksonian riposte: "Well, my Lord, you'll be pleased to recollect they did not make their own noses." Later Warren advised Thomas that if he did not abandon his antislavery activities, he put his chances of clerical promotion at risk; Thomas chose to ignore that advice.

Therefore in 1791, John's naval experience and his commitment to antislavery made him a suitable person to be sent to Nova Scotia to arrange for the Africans' voyage to Sierra Leone in response to Thomas Peters' request. He arrived at Halifax on 7th October aboard the aptly named *Ark*, and set about negotiating with both the local administrators and the prospective travellers. He travelled extensively across the difficult terrain and he was disgusted by the conditions in which the Africans were living and at the way in which they were treated. He wrote in his journal: "It is not in my powers to describe this shameful and scandalous conduct shown to the free blacks by many of the white people." The government had promised 60 to 100 acres of land to each African family, but they had not kept their word and many were forced to take up indentures, a form of slavery.

By December, over 1000 Africans had gathered in Halifax from throughout Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and John organised the fitting out of the fleet. These fifteen vessels made up perhaps one of the most significant collections of ships in Atlantic maritime history, and John included an illustration of them in his journal. They were: the *Betsey*, *Beaver*, *Mary*, *Felicity*, *Catherine Parr*, *Somerset*, *Eleanor*, *Morning Star*, *Prince William Henry*, *Two Brothers*, *Venus*, *Prince Fleury* and the flag ship, *Lucretia*. As John had promised the Africans before the voyage:

“...they must look on me as their friend and protector; that I should at all times be happy to redress their grievances and be ready to defend them with my life.”

Groups of Africans were placed in charge of one of their own number as ‘captain’. While in Nova Scotia and during the voyage John established a strong and friendly relationship with those whom he called the ‘Adventurers’. Possibly the scripture steeped Africans saw themselves as Israelites wrested from Egypt with Clarkson as their Moses.

The journey across the North Atlantic was difficult and John developed a fever. He was pronounced dead, but just as he was about to be buried at sea a slight movement was detected! However, he was greatly weakened by the fever and continued to be so for several weeks after his arrival in Africa. On arrival he discovered that the Sierra Leone Company had appointed six councillors to run the colony. Unfortunately, Henry Dalrymple, who had been put in charge, had been dismissed and Clarkson was asked to replace him. Reluctantly, he accepted on a temporary basis, but he held a low opinion of most of his fellow councillors. He wrote that they showed “nothing but extravagance, idleness, quarrelling, waste, irregularity in accounts, insubordination and everything that is contrary to what is good and right.” They also shared the European prejudice that blacks would labour while whites would rule. No office was found for Thomas Peters or any African, and it seemed that the unkept promises of Nova Scotia would be repeated. As superintendent, Clarkson wrongly became the focus for criticism, and at Easter 1792 he seemed to be faced with an African rebellion. Peters seems to have been its leader, but there is no account of his side of the affair. In May, he pleaded guilty to a charge of theft and he was ordered to return the goods. He appealed to Clarkson but Clarkson wrote in his journal: “Of course, I did not choose to interfere further in the business.” On 26th June, Peters, the self proclaimed ‘Speaker General’ for the Africans, died of a fever and further confrontation was avoided.

Clarkson’s time in Freetown saw three historically significant achievements. A store was set up by Africans, which sold goods not only to other Africans but also to Europeans. When four seamen refused an order to collect material to roof the settlers’ huts and called the settlers ‘Black Rascals’ and ‘other insulting and degrading expressions highly injurious to the harmony of the Colony and extremely offensive to the Nova Scotians’, they were ordered to be whipped in front of the assembled Africans. In elections held in 1792, the vote was given to householders, irrespective of sex, and as at least one third



John Clarkson, miniature 1791.



Thomas Clarkson with his chest of African goods at his feet, courtesy of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum.



*Old Grammar School, Hill Street, Wisbech, - birthplace of Thomas and John Clarkson
courtesy of Mrs Margaret Cave.*

AN
E S S A Y
ON THE
SLAVERY AND COMMERCE
OF THE
HUMAN SPECIES,
PARTICULARLY
THE AFRICAN,
TRANSLATED FROM A
LATIN DISSERTATION,
WHICH WAS HONOURED WITH
THE FIRST PRIZE
IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,
FOR THE YEAR 1785,
WITH ADDITIONS.

Neque premendo alium me extulisse velim.—LIVY.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED BY J. PHILLIPS, GEORGE-YARD, LOMBARD-
STREET, AND SOLD BY T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND,
AND J. PHILLIPS.

M, DCC. LXXXVI.

*Frontispiece to Thomas Clarkson's essay that first stirred his conscience
and then those of thousands of others,
courtesy of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum.*

of FREEMEN'. The poet, Southey, wrote of tea as 'the blood-sweetened beverage.' He was one of many literary and intellectual figures who lent their support to the campaign.

One of those who formed the new committee was Thomas Clarkson. He was born in Wisbech on 28th March 1760, in the school house as was later his brother John. He was the elder son of John Clarkson, headmaster of Wisbech Grammar School. As well as being headmaster, Rev. Clarkson was also afternoon lecturer at the parish church and also curate in the neighbouring parish of Walsoken, and on 31st March, after visiting the poor of that parish and returning in rain and wind after midnight, he died of a fever, offering a model of selfless help to others to his two sons. His widow, Anne, moved with her three children to what is now 8 Yorke Row, Wisbech owned by her cousin, Lawrence Banyer. Both boys attended Wisbech Grammar School, but Thomas who was to follow his father into a clerical career, entered St Paul's School in London in 1775. He went to his father's old college, St John's at Cambridge, in 1779. He gained his bachelor's degree with a first in mathematics in 1783 and later that year was ordained as a deacon.

In 1784, Clarkson won a Latin essay prize, and then determined to achieve something never done at Cambridge before and win a second essay prize. The title set by the vice-chancellor, Dr Peter Peckard, was: *anne liceat inuitos in servitutem dare?* 'Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?' Seldom can so academic an exercise have resulted in such profound consequences. Clarkson admitted that his original motive had been to gain literary honour, but as he began to assemble material for the essay, he came to realise the extent of the cruel horrors of slavery. He won first prize and then while riding to London in June 1785 at Wades Mill in Hertfordshire he dismounted and as he later wrote: "Here a thought came into my mind, that if the contents of the Essay were true, it was time some person should see these calamities come to an end." This Damascene moment was to see an academic exercise convert into a life dedicated to practical reform. With the help of his brother John, he translated the essay into English and expanded it to book length and it was published by the Quaker printer, James Phillips, in June 1786.

The book made Clarkson a minor celebrity and he widened his circle of Quaker acquaintances. He liked their plain lifestyle and casual attitude towards social deference, and their strong social commitment appealed to him. He later dropped his clerical title of 'reverend' and declined to wear clerical dress. He decided that the abolitionist cause needed a parliamentary

spokesman and he considered that William Wilberforce would be an ideal choice. Wilberforce was an eloquent orator, had many influential friends including the Prime Minister, William Pitt, and he was respected for his strong Evangelical convictions. At first, however, he was cool to Clarkson's overtures, but at a dinner party in May 1787, organised by Bennet Langton and attended by among others Sir Joshua Reynolds and James Boswell, he was persuaded by Clarkson to take up the abolitionist cause in the Commons. It was therefore Clarkson who won over Wilberforce to the cause.

On 25 June 1787, Thomas Clarkson set out on the first of his epic countrywide journeys. He rode on horseback and made effective use of the eighteenth century's 'information highway', the toll roads. These journeys had the dual purpose of allowing him to gather first hand evidence on the slave trade and to help to found and coordinate provincial abolitionist branches into a national movement. He went first to Bristol, where he interviewed men involved in the slave trade. On learning of the harsh treatment of certain sailors, he attempted to bring their assailants to justice, but the case was dismissed for lack of evidence. Thus he learnt the necessity of securing reliable witnesses. He gained access to Bristol customs house where he was able to study the records. He was also supplied with samples of various African products that he added to his growing collection that he was to keep in his famous chest and use to demonstrate that Africa offered more valuable trading opportunities than those in people.

While in Bristol, Clarkson met Alexander Falconbridge who had served as a surgeon on four slave voyages but who was now a doctor in the city. Falconbridge provided not only evidence on slavery but also gave Clarkson physical protection from his opponents, and Thomas persuaded the London committee to compensate him with £10 for the loss of his practice in order to allow him to accompany Clarkson on the next leg of his journey to Liverpool. On the way there he stopped at Gloucester, Worcester and Chester to encourage support for the abolitionist cause. Liverpool, however, proved more hostile than Bristol. People were unwilling to speak publicly against the slave trade and no abolition committee was founded there, although Clarkson was able to purchase examples of the horrific implements used by slavers. In a letter published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in March 1788 he was accused of using the evidence of 'unprincipled common sailors and dock landladies.'

Clarkson wrote of his visit to Liverpool: "I began to perceive that I was known in Liverpool as well as the object for which I came. They who came to see me always started the abolition of the slave trade as the subject for conversation.

Many entered into the justification of this trade with great warmth, as if to ruffle my temper... Others said they had heard of a person turned mad, who conceived the thought of destroying Liverpool and all its glory. The temper of many of the interested people of Liverpool had now become still more irritable and their hostility more apparent than before. I received anonymous letters entreating me to leave it or I would otherwise never leave it alive. The only effect which this advice had upon me was to make me more vigilant when I went out at night.

“There was a certain time when I had reason to believe that I had a narrow escape. I was one day on the pier head with many others looking at some small boats below at the time of a heavy gale. I had seen all I wanted to see and was departing when I noticed eight or nine persons making towards me. I was then only about eight or nine yards from the precipice of the pier, but going from it. I expected that that they would have divided to let me through them; instead of which they closed upon me as if that they had a design to throw me over the pier head. Vigorous on account of the danger, I darted forward. One of them against whom I pushed myself, fell down. Their ranks were broken and I escaped not without blows amidst their imprecations and abuse.”

From Liverpool, Clarkson travelled to Manchester where he received a very much more sympathetic reception. Encouraged by this, he returned to London after more than five months of travelling. He had collected the names of more than 20,000 seamen in the slave trade and he knew what had become of each one. Now in 1788 he was in charge of organizing pro-abolition witnesses to appear before an enquiry into the slave trade held before the Committee on Trade and Plantations of the Privy Council. To this enquiry, Clarkson brought his box of African trading goods. During a recess he rode a further 1,600 miles in two months to gather fresh evidence. In April 1789, the Privy Council issued a 850 page report setting out the case for and against the slave trade.

On 12th May 1789, William Wilberforce made his first parliamentary speech against slavery. This proposed legislation had been delayed by the political hiatus resulting from George III's temporary insanity, but Wilberforce's eloquence now proved very persuasive. To those who argued that the French would simply take over the slave trade, he said the same could be said of any evil. “For those who argue thus may argue equally, that we may rob, murder and commit any crime, which any one else would have committed, if we did not.” However, his eloquence was not matched by his tactical parliamentary

skills and his opponents protested that parliament needed to gather its own evidence and so the legislation was delayed. The question was "by the intrigue of our opponents deferred to another year," as Clarkson described it.

Meanwhile events in France in the spring and early summer of 1789 had given great encouragement to libertarians in England, and on 7th August, Thomas Clarkson was sent to make contact with French abolitionists in the *Société des Amis des Noirs*. He was much impressed by what he found and possibly the 29-year-old shared Wordsworth's sentiments:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven!"

He visited the Bastille which was being dismantled and acquired one of its stones graffited by a former prisoner, which he carried with him for the rest of his life as a talisman of liberty. His reputation had already been established in France through his writings and he met many leading revolutionaries. Mirabeau was most impressed with the print of *Brookes* and he ordered a wooden model of it a yard long complete with cramped carved figures for his dining room. However, despite the Declaration of the Rights of Man, *égalité* and *fraternité* did not flourish for African slaves and although Mirabeau tried to raise the issue of slavery in the National Assembly, as in Britain the deputies managed to delay its discussion.

Subsequent events in France such as the Terror's excesses and the trial and execution of Louis XVI turned much of British opinion against the Revolution. This led to the end of the symbiotic double helix that had existed between the French and British Enlightenments during the eighteenth century. Now, Janus, like while the French government fostered the ideals of the Revolution, the British government became reactionary, an attitude that only increased as the two countries went to war with one another. All progressive causes were disapproved of and this included abolitionism.

Early in 1791, the Commons' report on slavery was finished. It was 1,700 pages long, so members of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade set about producing a more manageable digest which they circulated to M.P.s. On 18th April, Wilberforce launched new legislation. The debate lasted two days but ended in defeat, with 163 votes to 88.

Clarkson's sympathies with the French Revolution remained strong and on 14th July 1791, he attended a dinner at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, London, to celebrate the second anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. This attracted

much criticism including from Wilberforce who said: "O Clarkson, I wanted much to see you to tell you to keep clear from the subject of the French Revolution and I hope you will." Discretionary caution met idealistic commitment. In 1792 the Convention in France bestowed French citizenship not only on Clarkson and Tom Paine but also on Wilberforce who "*par leurs écrits et par leur courage, ont servi la cause de la liberté et préparé l'affranchissement des peuples.*" By their writings and bravery they had served the cause of liberty and prepared the way for the freedom of peoples.

Because of the war and a slave uprising on Saint Domingue, sugar prices were rising greatly, as was the demand for slaves and the slave trade was proving increasingly profitable. One trader wrote: "Everything in the shape of a ship is fitting out for Africa,... (and) the money made by the voyages just now concluded exceeds anything ever known." In the face of this powerful vested interest, the abolitionists continued to muster public feeling in a country where only a very small minority had the vote. 519 petitions containing about 390,000 signatures were presented to parliament in 1792. Only four petitions were presented in favour of the Slave Trade. Between 1765 and 1784 only 250,000 people had signed petitions on any subject.

A fresh bill was presented 2nd April 1792, but it was effectively blocked by the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, who moved that any ban should not come into force before 1796. Once again Wilberforce's eloquence had been outmanoeuvred by parliamentary tacticians. In the Lords even Dundas' 'gradualist' approach was rejected and the bill met with total opposition. The abolition cause seemed to have been lost, although it continued to attract radical support. Wilberforce was very concerned by these "madheaded professors of liberty and equality." When the government set out to restrict public meetings by means of the Seditious Meetings and the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Acts, Wilberforce gave these acts his support. A campaign weary Clarkson, now married, retired to farm in the Lake District. Here his neighbours and friends included the Wordsworths and Coleridge. Sam was the only person to address him as Tom, and called him a "moral Steam-Engine... He shall be my Friend, Exemplar, Saint." In 1807, Wordsworth in a sonnet called him "firm friend of human kind."

After several years of dormancy, the final phase of the campaign opened in 1804. Any activity had been suppressed by the harsh repression of civil liberties and the activities of informers spying on any reformist movements. With Napoleon's imperial designs, the paranoia over Jacobinism abated. The Act of Union of 1800 admitted a hundred Irish M.P.s to Westminster, most of

whom supported abolition. The Abolition Committee was reformed and in June 1804, Thomas Clarkson came out of retirement to join it. On 30th May, Wilberforce introduced a new bill. It succeeded in the Commons and passed to the Lords on 28th June, where the measure was postponed until the next session, only to be defeated in the Commons by seven votes in 1805.

The Abolition Committee had been joined by a younger leading maritime lawyer, James Stephen, who used his knowledge to devise a flanking manoeuvre to introduce abolition of the slave trade. Many ships were circumventing the continental blockade under the 'neutral' American flag, even though their owners were British. By the proposed legislation all ships would be banned from trading with French colonies. This included slave ships and Banastre Tarleton, an M.P. long opposed to abolition, said that the abolitionists "were now coming by a sidewind on the planters."



A print of the cameo of a kneeling slave produced by Josiah Wedgewood, courtesy of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum.

The prime minister, William Pitt, exhausted by long years of warfare, died in 1805. He was succeeded by Lord Grenville, who was more favourable to the abolitionists' cause. He decided to call a snap election. This was the first campaign in which abolition became a political issue, so that the Abolition Committee worked hard to raise public awareness and support for pro-abolitionist candidates. After his victory, Grenville suggested that the abolition measure should be introduced first in the Lords, where it was passed by 100 votes to 34. To ensure its passage through the Commons, the Committee set up their headquarters in 18 Downing Street, from where they canvassed M.P.s. Once more Clarkson set off on his travels to muster support in the provinces. Cotton manufacturers in Manchester, concerned by the impact of the legislation on their trade, had organised a 439 signature petition. Re-establishing his former allies, Clarkson organised one with 2354 signatures.

On 24th February 1807, the legislation was passed in the Commons by a landslide 283 to 16. It now awaited royal assent, but George III, angered by Grenville's Catholic emancipation bill, had ordered his prime minister to deliver up his seals of office. Just before he was about to do so, the king signed the act. However, the consequent election threatened a parliament that might repeal the legislation. Again the Abolitionists busied themselves in campaigning. This was the only occasion when Wilberforce was faced with a contest, but as he did not have the financial resources of his landed opponents, a £64,000 campaign fund was established by 2800 abolitionists. He was elected as one of the members for Yorkshire which with 20,000 electors had the largest body of electors in Britain at the time.

On hearing of the bill's successful passage, Wilberforce asked his Evangelical cousin, Henry Thornton, "Well Henry, and what shall we abolish next?" Thornton replied: "The Lottery, I think." Although much exhilarated by the news, Thomas Clarkson was aware of the slightly pyrrhic nature of the victory. As he wrote in 1823: "It was supposed, that, by effecting the abolition of the slave trade, the axe would be laid to the root of the whole evil." However, he and John were to continue the fight and slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, but it still persisted elsewhere. Perhaps were one to choose an epigram, one might borrow the epitaph to Sir Christopher Wren: "*Si monumentum requiris circumspice.*" If you are looking for a monument, look about you. Think of those whose sweated labour produces cheap clothing and electrical goods. Think of the condition of the world's migrant work force. Yet it was Clarkson who taught us the priceless gift of empathy for our fellow humans and it was he who helped establish the mechanisms to campaign for change. This is not to belittle the significance of 1807 and its

victory over powerful and extensive vested interests. Clarkson wrote of it in *"The History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade"* (1808): "I scarcely know of any subject the contemplation of which is more pleasing than that of the correction or of the removal of any of the acknowledged evils of life; for while we rejoice to think that the sufferings of our fellow creatures have been thus, in any instance, relieved, we must have been necessarily improved by the change."

FURTHER READING

I am greatly indebted to:

Ellen Gibson Wilson: **John Clarkson**

and the African Adventure. Macmillan 1980

Ellen Gibson Wilson: **Thomas Clarkson: A Biography.** Macmillan 1989

Adam Hochschild: **Bury the Chains.** Houghton Mifflin 2005

Simon Schama: **Rough Crossings.** BBC Books 2006

And to the Wisbech and Fenland Museum collection.

