ST. PAUL'S CHURCH
MILL HILL

CELEBRATION OF THE BICENTENARY OF THE ABOLITION OF THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

2007

To the memory of

William Wilberforce

(Born in Hull August 24th 1759, Died in London July 29th 1833)

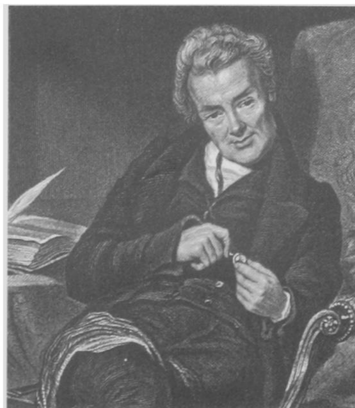
For nearly half a century a member of the House of Commons,
And, for six Parliaments during that period,
One of the two representatives for Yorkshire.

In an age and country fertile in great and good men,
He was among the foremost of those who fixed the character of their times,
Because to high and various talents,
To warm benevolence, and to universal candour,
He added the abiding eloquence of a Christian life.

Eminent as he was in every department of public labour,
And a leader in every work of charity,
Whether to relieve the temporal or the spiritual wants of his fellow men,
His name will ever be specially identified,
With those exertions,
Which, by the blessings of **GOD**, removed from England,
The guilt of the African Slave Trade,
And prepared the way for the abolition of slavery,
In every colony of the empire:

In the prosecution of these objects,
He relied, not in vain, on **GOD**;
But in the progress he was called to endure
Great obloquy and Great Opposition:
He outlived, however, all enmity;
And in the evening of his days,
Withdrew from public life and public observation
To the bosom of his family.
Yet he died not unnoticed or forgotten by his country:
The peers and commons of England,
With Lord Chancellor, and The Speaker, at their head,
In solemn procession from their respective houses,
Carried him to his fitting place,
Among the mighty dead around,
Here to repose:
Till, through the merits of **JESUS CHRIST**,
His only redeemer and saviour,
(Whom, in his life and his writings he had desired to glorify,)
He shall rise in the resurrection of the just.

Inscription on the Wilberforce Memorial in Westminster Abbey



William Wilberforce

Preface

On 27th. March 1807, a Bill to abolish British involvement in the trade in slaves received the Royal Assent and passed into law. This success was achieved after a long campaign led in Parliament by William Wilberforce.

In the bicentenary year of 2007 many commemorative events were held throughout the Country. These events have particular resonance here for it was to Mill Hill that Wilberforce retired on leaving Parliament and during that retirement built 'his chapel', now St.Paul's Church.

Celebrations at St.Paul's church took the form of an extended programme of linked events organised on behalf of the church by Mr George Jones.

This booklet is a record of those events.

The programme began and ended with music. Concerts by The London Community Gospel Choir and The St. Ignatius Gospel Choir reflected the importance of song in sustaining people during the trials of enslavement.

Displays and Exhibitions were mounted in many of the Barnet public libraries making known Wilberforce's abolitionist work and his local connections.

Visits were made to local Schools to talk of the work of Wilberforce and of the need to continue that work today. Pupils were encouraged to set down their thoughts on slavery in words and in art and some of this work has now been published.

At a number of open public meetings, invited speakers explored in detail some aspects of Wilberforce's life and work. Each talk was followed by lively discussion. Topics included the slave trade itself, the parliamentary campaign to abolish it in the 19th. century and the need for a campaign in the present century, the influence of his contemporaries in his life and work and his retirement and the building of his church. The text of these talks forms the major part of this booklet.

St Paul's was host to the walkers on the penultimate stage of the 'Sankofa Walk of Reconciliation', a public expression of regret for events of the past and of determination to act against forms of slavery present today.

G. Jones

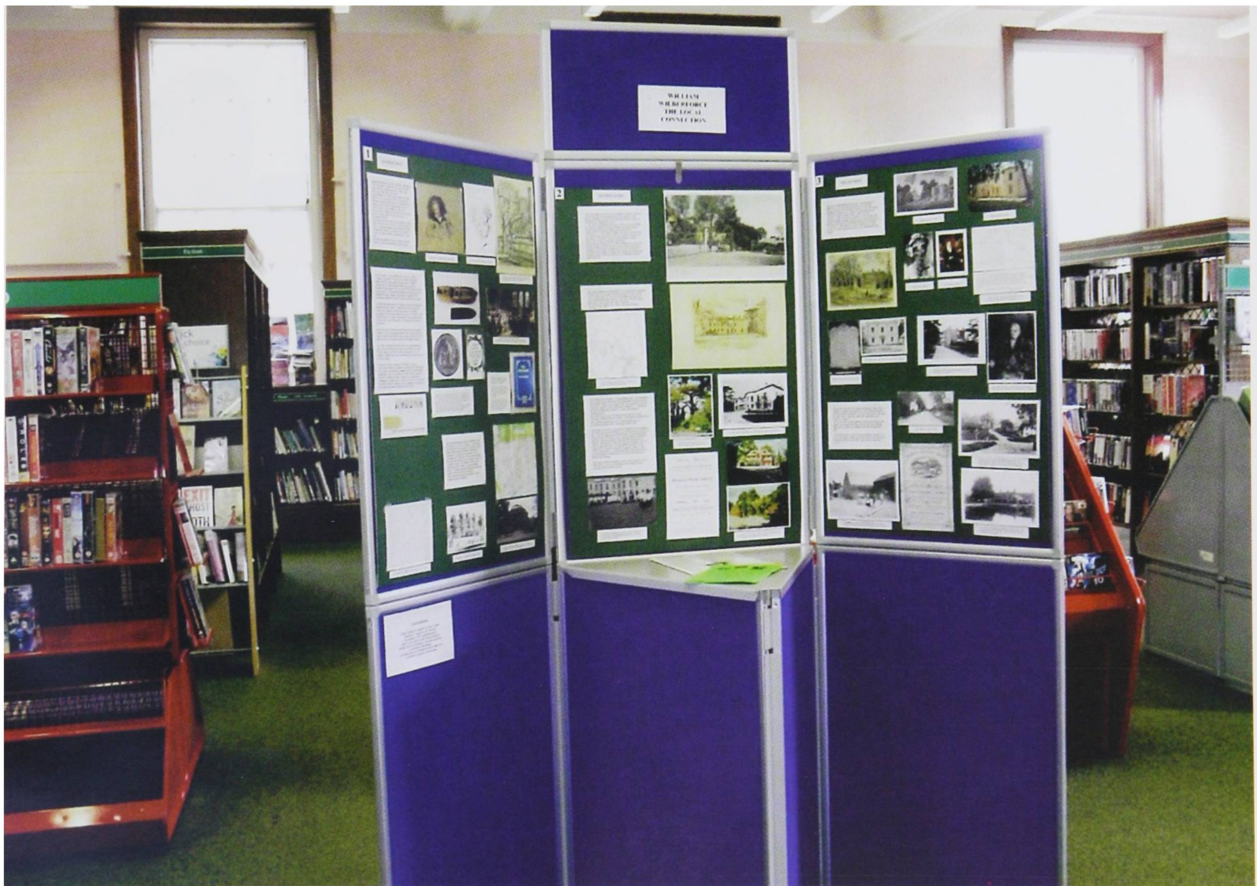
The St. Ignatius Caribbean Choir

G. Jones

Exhibition of work of Anti Slavery International

P. Grant

Example of schoolchildren's artwork


G. Jones

Wilberforce Display at a local Public Library

G. Jones

David Pott and the marchers on the Sankofa Walk of Reconciliation

J. MacDonald-Fulton

A pause on the march at the site of Wilberforce's home

L C G.C.

Bazil and The London Community Gospel Choir

St. Paul's Archives

Hendon Park - from an old print

M. Worms

Cedar at Crown Close

William Pitt addressing the Commons in the old Commons Chamber.
Wilberforce is seated in front of the 3rd pillar from left.
(From the painting by Anton Hickel 1793. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery).

Thomas Clarkson addressing the members of the
Anti-Slavery Society at the convention held in 1849
(From the painting by Benjamin Robert Haydon Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery

M. Thompson

The Wilberforce Centre

M. Worms

Bricks stamped with Wilberforce's initials recovered during remodelling works

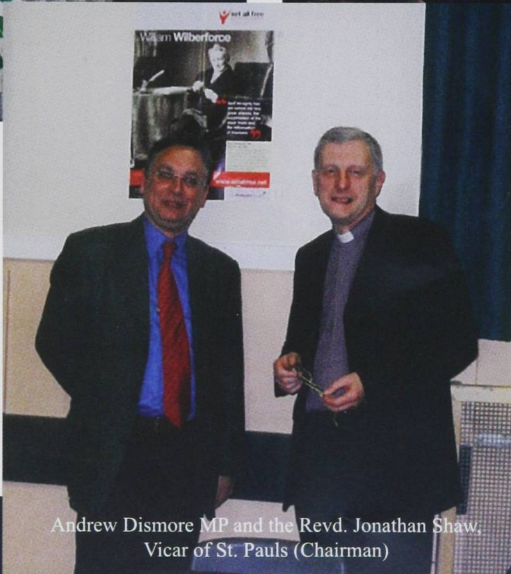
THE SPEAKERS

G. Jones

Kevin Belmonte

G. Jones

Sarah Williams



G. Jones

Andrew Dismore MP and the Revd. Jonathan Shaw, Vicar of St. Pauls (Chairman)

G. Jones

Michael Worms

G. Jones

Marylynn Rouse

Britain and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

DAVID KILLINGRAY

Emeritus Professor of History, Goldsmiths College, University of London

Sometime in the mid 1750s a boy and his sister were left in the walled compound of the family home while their parents went to work in the nearby fields. All was safe and secure. But suddenly 'two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both; and, without giving us time to cry out, they stopped our mouths, tied our hands, and ran off with us into the nearest wood.'

The parents returned from the fields to find the children gone– and oh the grief! It is all too familiar. The pain etched on the face of the tearful mother, the father's anxious movements, together the burden of guilt that they were not there when they were most needed; the repetitive thought of 'if only we had not', or 'if only we had'. And that constant fear permanently fuelled by the imagination of what might be happening to a dearly loved child. Our hearts run cold at the thought, our minds become a confused tangle of emotions. It is indeed, a parent's worst nightmare!

The account of capture by African slavers was written in 1789 by Olaudah Equiano, an African Briton, who was born in what is now southern Nigeria. He was soon parted from his 'dear sister', taken to the coast, and shipped across the Atlantic to slavery in the Americas. Equiano's parents never saw their children again, never knew what happened to them.

This was undoubtedly the lot of many a child and adult in the coastal areas of West Africa during the years of the European dominated transatlantic slave trade from the late 15th century to the mid 19th century. During those 400 years some 10-12 million African slaves were taken in European owned ships from West Africa to the American colonies.

The African slave trade to the Americas

European interest in African slaves long preceded the transatlantic slave trade. In the mid-fourteenth century, before European knowledge of the American continent, Portuguese and other ships steadily nudged down the West African coastline, returning home with slaves to be sold in the markets of southern Europe. The transatlantic slave trade began in the 1520s and continued until the 1860s. The first states involved were Portugal and Spain which sought cheap labour to work American mines and plantations in place of enslaved Native Americans who, with little resistance to Old World diseases, suffered high mortality rates. Iberian traders were soon joined by other European states with imperial interests – the Dutch, English/British, French, Danes, Swedes, and Brandenburgers.

The transatlantic slave trade involved Europeans buying slaves from African traders on the West African coast and shipping them to the American colonies, a business that was mutually advantageous. Africans controlled the supply of slaves which came from the domestic slave system and included criminals and prisoners of war, but also kidnapped people. As the European demand for coerced labour increased, so African polities responded by waging wars to capture slaves for export. Slaves were assembled by African dealers who exchanged them with European merchants at coastal 'factories' for a wide range of imported manufactured goods such as bar iron, linen and cotton cloth, firearms, gunpowder, alcohol, and also cowries and other goods used as 'common currency'. African traders were economically astute and hard bargainers in a system of commerce where the supply of slaves and thus prices fluctuated. Ships called intermittently along the coast and slaves were collected in barracoons, or prisons, to await sale and transportation. Death rates among slaves during this initial period of capture, transfer to the coast, and imprisonment were high.

During the 350 years of the transatlantic slave trade, some 12 million people were shipped on the 'middle passage' to the Americas. Ships ranged from 100 to 500 tonnes and the practice of packing slaves tightly was widespread. However abhorrent the slave trade to modern eyes it is important to note that it was conducted as a rational economic activity, the main purpose being to get a human cargo live to market and thus to realise a good profit.

The sea journey, depending upon destination, seasonal winds and tides might take between six weeks and several months. Inevitably mortality rates were high, varying from five to over 30 percent. Slave deaths on British ships in the years 1662-1807 were 450,000, or 13.2 percent, although following parliamentary regulation in the years from 1788 to abolition in 1807, the mortality rate was reduced to an average of about five percent per annum. Most slaves in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries went to the Portuguese and Dutch sugar plantations in Brazil, and to a lesser extent to the major Spanish Caribbean islands. However, from the late seventeenth century onwards plantations were rapidly developed on the smaller islands of the Caribbean and the demand for slaves steadily increased. During the years 1520 to the 1860s some 42 percent of slaves went to the islands of the Caribbean, 38 percent to Brazil, and a mere four to five percent to the North American colonies.

The British dominance of the slave trade

From the late seventeenth century onwards Britain's global trade expanded rapidly. Indian Ocean and Atlantic commerce became closely interlinked with East Indian cloth and cowries becoming important commodities used in the West African slave trade.

By 1670 English/British ships had probably come to dominate the transatlantic slave trade. Between 1662 and 1807 some 3.4 million West African slaves were carried in British ships on the 'middle passage' across the Atlantic, the vast majority being landed in the Caribbean islands. The overall sex ratio of slaves carried in British ships was 70:30 although this varied by region.

There are few African voices recording the 'middle passage'. The best known is Olaudah Equiano whose autobiographical *Interesting Narrative* was published in London in 1789. Here is his account:

The stench of the hold ... [where] the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. ... the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves .... This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.

Harsh slave systems in the Caribbean led to high death rates and low reproduction levels, thus requiring constant replenishment of new human imports. By 1750 the Black population of the British Empire numbered 550,000, with 295,000 in the Caribbean, and 247,000 in the north American colonies. Black slaves greatly outnumbered whites in the Caribbean islands creating a constant fear of slave revolt; in Jamaica in 1768 the black population outnumbered whites by nearly 10:1, and in the 1830s by 20:1.

Slave revolts were suppressed with great brutality, e.g. Jamaica 1760. A small part of the black population in the American colonies was of mixed race, mainly a product of the sexual exploitation that went with whites owning slaves. Although some black and 'coloured' people were free, colour was a badge of inferiority and free blacks lived under legal restrictions and also the constant anxiety that they might be re-enslaved.

Although a small number of white convicts and indentured labourers continued to be sent to British American colonies until the outbreak of the American revolutionary war in 1776, it was generally accepted in Britain, probably by the late seventeenth century, that white people should not be slaves. The refrain of James Thompson's popular song of 1740, sung by countless patriots, categorically stated that 'Britons never will be slaves'. However, black people could be slaves, although it was also increasingly recognised that Africans and people of African descent were fellow human beings.

African slavery was justified in various ways: necessity was a prominent view, there being few Britons who could perceive an American Imperial economy without the use of slave labour. Tropical production relied on slavery. Africans might be human, even if some continued to argue otherwise, but as savages they were brute beasts, untamed peoples, who, child-like, needed to be forcibly induced into disciplined labour. And the sanction of Scripture was never far away, particularly the muddled hermeneutic that identified Africans as the 'sons of Ham' and divinely destined for slavery. To this should also be added the ideas of 'scientific racism' and polygenesis that were first expressed in the late sixteenth century and given added weight by Enlightenment thinkers such as Hume, Voltaire, and Kant. A further justification, and false comfort for the conscience, came in the belief that, by enslavement and transport to the Americas, Africans thus had the opportunity to hear the Gospel, although evangelisation of slaves was strongly resisted by most slave holders until the latter decades of the eighteenth century.

The British slave trade and colonial slave production was largely a system of triangular trade that by the mid eighteenth century was generally believed to be vital to the continued welfare of the British domestic and Imperial economy. In 1745 Malachy Postlethwayt wrote that the British Empire was 'a magnificent superstructure of American commerce and naval power on an African foundation'. British ports such as London, Liverpool, and Bristol, along with many minor ones such as Whitehaven, Preston, Chester, Glasgow, Lyme Regis, sent ships to the Guinea coast for slaves. Slaves sold in the American colonies were exchanged for slave produced goods destined for British consumers. During the eighteenth century slave produced sugar became an important ingredient in the changing diet of Britons who also bought and consumed in increasing volume the rum, molasses, tobacco, coffee, cotton, and rice from American plantations. British exports to, and imports from the American colonies, as well as re-exports of American produce, increased in volume and value throughout the eighteenth century.

How significant was the slave trade and slave produced goods to the burgeoning British economy and especially to financing industrial change? This historiographical question, which is also intensely ideological, has been a subject of debate since Eric Williams' seminal and influential book *Capitalism and Slavery* was published in 1944. Williams, influenced by the ideas of Marxist economic determinism, placed the slave trade and West Indian slavery into a broad and ambitious scheme of global economics. He argued that British mercantilism declined following the outbreak of the war of American independence and gave way to free trade, and that the wealth derived from the slave trade and slave production helped to finance Britain's industrialisation. Williams insights were brilliant, but detailed research over the past 60 yrs has not validated his ideas. In fact the wealth derived from slaving and slave ownership and production made a very small fiscal contribution to British capital formation in the eighteenth century and to financing industrial development.

Further there is little evidence that the planter class in the West Indies was actually facing declining fortunes when abolition came in 1807. Despite war, debts, and ecological problems in the 1790s and the first half decade of the nineteenth century, slave labour had not lost its resilience, was more productively employed, so that the majority of West Indian estates remained profitable at least until 1815. This led Seymour Drescher to argue 30 years ago that Britain's abolition of the slave trade, coming at a time when both the West Indian economy and slave trading were buoyant, was an action that he termed *econocide.*

The debate continues and recently Joseph E. Inikori has supported Williams' thesis. Taking the expanding Atlantic commerce of 1650-1850 as his focus, he has argued that 'the cheap raw materials produced by Africans, especially raw cotton, were critical to England's industrialization' and that 'Atlantic commerce was central to the successful completion of England's industrialization ... [and] that the contribution of Africans was central to the origin of the Industrial Revolution in England'. Methinks he speaks against the tide of evidence.

Whatever, slave produced goods of all kinds permeated, touched and tainted British society at all levels. The many trades and services that sustained Atlantic commerce also served the interests of the slaving economy. Capitalists and manufacturers, bankers, and insurance brokers, all benefited by providing finance, trade goods, and shipping services to sustain the slave trade and the colonial slave economies. In the twenty years 1788-1807 when abolitionism became a popular moral cause, the slave trade and slave production continued to be profitable enterprises.

Abolition

In 1760s very few people saw the slave trade for what it was: a cruel and wicked traffic in human beings that involved robbery and murder on a large scale that was endorsed by the state.

One who did was ***Granville Sharp*** – an evangelical civil servant with some eccentric ideas, a musician, prolific pamphleteer, a self-taught lawyer who battled in the courts to gain the liberty of Black people in Britain. It was due to Sharp that in 1772 the Mansfield decision stated that Black people in England could not be forcibly removed to the colonies. A first legal blow for Black civil rights that, although it did not end slavery in England, certainly marked the beginning of its end.

Then there were the ***Quakers who formed an Abolition Committee 1783*** – the first religious denomination to declare that members should not be involved in the slave trade. As a small group of dissenters c.20,000 around the country – they made few waves. The influential lobby of West Indian planters and traders were little disturbed by such ideas, nor those contained in John Wesley's condemnatory *Thoughts upon Slavery* (1773).

However, a lengthy book written in 1784 by the ***Revd James Ramsey***, the vicar of Teston in Kent, presented a more pointed threat. Ramsey had not only lived and worked in the British West Indies for two decades as a doctor, he had also owned slaves, and in condemning the slave trade he wrote from first hand knowledge. Ramsey's vicarage became a focus for anti-slave trade planning in 1786-7, and one of the major figures involved was Thomas Clarkson.

Clarkson was another Anglican, destined for a career in the Church. He was born in Wisbech, studied at Cambridge and in 1785, at the age of 25, won the Members' Prize for an essay in Latin: *Is it right to make slaves of others against their will?* The title had been set by Peter Pekard, the university's vice-chancellor, who had recently preached a sermon condemning the slave trade.

Clarkson came up to Cambridge, read his prize essay in the Senate House, and then set off to ride back to London. As he recalled, on the ride the questions raised in the essay that he had publicly read 'wholly engrossed my thoughts'. Coming to Wades Hill in Hertfordshire, he later wrote:

'I sat down disconsolate on the turf by the roadside and held my horse. 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 to their end'.

He had found his cause – one that was to occupy him for the rest of his long life in which he campaigned to end the slave trade by Britain and other European powers, and then slavery in the British Empire and elsewhere.

Clarkson met with Ramsey and other abolitionists at Teston. In May 1787 he was a founder member of the Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, a body composed mainly of Quakers, and a few evangelical Anglicans; Wilberforce was not a member; indeed, he did not speak in parliament on the slave trade until 1789.

The Abolition Committee was faced with an uphill task. Opposition was considerable from a well-funded and influential West Indian lobby; while it was widely perceived that the wealth of Britain and its Atlantic empire, now that most N. American colonies were lost, was vital to the Imperial economy.

The Committee's campaign involved the kind of actions that ever since we have come to associate with the business of lobbying. Clarkson set about gathering data, and he risked life and limb by covertly visiting slave ships and slavers in the major slave ports Liverpool, London, and Bristol. The Committee also set about gathering names and subscribers; publishing and distributing books and pamphlets; creating committees in towns up and down the country to petition parliament; while Wedgewood produced a medallion that had a kneeling slave with the caption: 'Am I not a man and a brother? A national boycott of sugar and other slave produced goods was organised.
Black people in Britain – possibly 10-15,000 – were also involved in abolitionist campaign.

Ottobah Cugoano – kidnapped from West Africa, taken to West Indies, slave labour, then brought to Britain in 1772 by his owner. Cugoano was baptised, attended school was freed, or perhaps freed himself. Whatever his youthful baptism had meant, by the 1780s he had become an evangelical Christian and active in securing Granville Sharp's help to prevent fellow Blacks being forcibly removed from the country to the colonies.

In 1787 he self-published his book Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery ...by a Native of Africa, that appealed to natural rights and justice and the Bible to denounce in passionate language the slave trade, slavery and also imperialism. trade, slavery, and also imperialism.

Olaudah Equiano was an Afro-British friend of Cugoano's who, similarly had been kidnapped, sold into slavery, and shipped to the Americas. Equiano bought his freedom, came to Britain, served in the Royal Navy, and then in 1789 published and sold his 2 vol, autobiography The Interesting Narrative of Gustavus Vassa, ... the African. The book sold well and went into several editions, and became a major anti-slave trade tract.

Equiano's evangelical principles are clearly expressed in the frontispiece portrait where he holds a Bible open at Acts 4.12: 'for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved'.
Sales of his book made Equiano a prosperous man; he married a white English wife, from Soham in Cambridgeshire.

The abolitionist campaign grew and transcended social class and religious affiliation: it was led primarily by Christians but also involved free thinkers; supporters included radicals, Tories, Whigs, working class people and aristocrats, and also a growing number of women. In 1792 some 400,000 people signed petitions to parliament to end the slave trade.
An interesting question is how so many people who had known little of the slave trade were persuaded in a relatively short time to support its abolition.

Nevertheless, progress was slow but in 1807 parliament eventually passed an Act to abolish the British slave trade. Pressure came from without parliament from a huge ground swell of public opinion. But parliamentarians were also influenced by changes in Britain's global political position e.g. the war with France, and also by serious slave rebellions in the Caribbean, particularly in St Domingue in the1790s.

Abolition did not mean the end of slavery. That continued in the British Empire for another 30 years. And when emancipation came in 1838, freed slaves continued to live in poverty and deprivation while the state paid £20m compensation to the slave owners for loss of 'property'! Freed Black West Indian labour was subject to harsh labour laws, continued to work as before in the sugar industry, and to endure social, economic and political discrimination.

And some would argue that many of Africa's current ills are due to the impact of the slave trade, and that the impoverishment of much of the Caribbean islands owes much to the depressive system of slavery that endured for so many years.

William Wilberforce, the Parliamentarian and his Contribution to the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act

ANDREW DISMORE

Member of Parliament for Hendon

Introduction

"One of the most engaging men in the history of politics", William Wilberforce (1759 – 1833) dedicated virtually most of his career to the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery in British territories.

In this talk, I would like to highlight the Parliamentary aspect of Wilberforce's campaign, and also perhaps draw some parallels between campaigning then, and now.

Wilberforce himself never sailed in a slave ship. He never saw at first hand the horror of the African depots. His crusade was based on imaginative sympathy.

So great was the opposition to the campaign for abolition that it demanded all Wilberforce's fortitude and perseverance, for he had set himself to overcome one of the most powerful of vested interests.

Wilberforce Meets Pitt

Wilberforce was born into a wealthy Hull family, and after Cambridge, he had to make his mind up about his future.

Pleasure, so he had already found, did not satisfy him, though he never scorned it. The family banking house was managed for him by his cousin. Wilberforce therefore decided to stand for the House of Commons, at the age of 21: he was born in the same year as Pitt. Their friendship lasted pretty well throughout their lives.

Wilberforce met Pitt in the Commons Stranger's Gallery, where they listened to debates about the American War of Independence.

They differed widely in temperament. Wilberforce was volatile, emotional, laughter-loving and socially at ease. Pitt was intellectual, cool and reserved.

The First Elections

Wilberforce returned to Hull in the autumn of 1780, for his first Parliamentary election, having done some canvassing of Hull electors living in London. He was liked in Hull and was already seen as an orator. He had planned to spend between £8,000 and £9,000 on the election.

He received 1,126 votes, the same as his two opponents put together.

Pitt was not elected, but before the end of the year he was "elected" by the rotten borough of Appleby, given to him as a present!

By January 1781, their friendship was renewed in the Commons. In December 1783, aged 24, Pitt became Prime Minister, with the eloquent support of Wilberforce.

In March 1784, Parliament was again dissolved. At the time, Wilberforce, MP for Hull, was speaking in York when the message was brought of the general election.

The Yorkshiremen cried out "we'll have this little man for our county member!". Wilberforce got overwhelming support and was elected unopposed.

Whilst legend has it that Wilberforce was the Hull MP throughout his career, in fact, this was only for one term. For most of his time in Parliament, he was the county MP for Yorkshire.

Abolition: Wilberforce's early campaign

The campaign for abolition of slavery had been gathering pace. By the summer of 1787, a formal "committee for the abolition of the slave trade" was established. The committee easily persuaded Wilberforce to back them in the Commons. The task would be a long and hard one!

Thus, in the summer of 1787 Pitt, Grenville, one of the other great politicians of the age, and Wilberforce sat together "at the root of an old tree at Holwood". Pitt asked Wilberforce "why don't you give notice of a motion on the subject of the slave trade? Do not lose time, or the ground may be occupied by another". The tree is still known as the "Wilberforce Oak".

But the opposition were mobilising – at Court, in Society, in Parliament. Its participants argued the trade was necessary and humane. The demand for abolition was from "mere busy bodies".

To gather evidence, Pitt proposed a Privy Council Committee, to inquire "into the conditions of British commercial intercourse with Africa", with Pitt supervising the inquiry in person.

The First Attempts in Parliament

On 9th May 1788, Pitt moved that the House should consider the circumstances of the slave trade, early in the next session. At that time Wilberforce was ill and Pitt had agreed to introduce the debate himself, if Wilberforce could not.

Charles James Fox then said he too, intended to move the resolution, but: "when he heard that the Member for Yorkshire had resolved to take it up, he was unaffectedly rejoiced". He demanded the Trade should be destroyed, not regulated. So did Edmund Burke, pledged to the "full, clean course of Abolition".

Pitt – Burke – Fox: the "full set", behind the cause.

During the same session, Sir William Dolben MP visited a slave ship moored in the Thames. He was so appalled, he gave notice of a Bill for restricting the number of slaves carried in proportion to the size of the ship.

Liverpool merchants gave evidence at the bar of the House. The average death rate was shown to be 5-10% - and that in one case, a third had died.

This Bill was passed by the Commons, but there was substantial Lords opposition, including from the Lord Chancellor, Thurlow. Pitt told Grenville that if the Lords rejected the Bill, he would not remain in the same Cabinet with its opposers. The Bill passed the Lords by two votes.

The Privy Council Report

In April 1789, the Privy Council report was ready. The evidence in support of abolition was there. On the 10th April 1789 Pitt wrote to Wilberforce: "the more we consider, the more irresistible it is in all its parts".

The debate was on 12th May 1789. Wilberforce proposed the motion, speaking for 3½ hours.

Burke commented: "The principles were so well laid down, and supported with so much force and order, that it equalled anything I have heard in modern times, and is not perhaps to be surpassed in the remains of Grecian eloquence".

Wilberforce concluded: "The nature and all the circumstances of this Trade are now laid open to us. We can no longer plead ignorance. We cannot evade it. We may spurn it. We may kick it out of the way. But we cannot turn aside so as to avoid seeing it. For it is brought now so directly before our eyes that this House must decide and must justify to all the world and to its own conscience, the rectitude of the grounds of its decision.

Let not Parliament be the only body that is insensible to the principles of natural justice. Let us make reparation to Africa, so far as we can, by establishing a trade upon true commercial principles, and we shall soon find the rectitude of our conduct rewarded by the benefits of a regular and growing commerce".

Burke, Pitt and Fox all spoke, backing the cause.

But their opponents used delaying tactics. Lord Maitland raised Commons privilege. The Commons could not accept the Privy Council report – the evidence had to be given direct, at the bar of the Commons.

This proposal carried the day.

The House went into Committee session, and after nine days of evidence, it was decided that they should continue in the next session.

Parliament resumed in January 1790 and the evidence hearings went on.

The debates of 1791 were much the same, but by then, Members were more concerned about the events in France. The Commons rejected Wilberforce's motion by 163 votes to 88.

The next steps

The next step was to build support in the country, public meetings and petitioning of the Commons.

The 1792 debate was again opened by Wilberforce. He described how six British slave ships opened fire and bombarded the slave dealers for three hours, killing twenty people and injuring many. The effect was to force the slave-dealers to sell their slaves at a lower price.

The debate was closed by Pitt.

"What had Great Britain done for Africa, save to rob her of thousands of her people every year?

What astonishing, I had almost said, what irreparable mischief have we brought upon that Continent? How shall we hope to obtain, if it be possible, forgiveness from Heaven for the enormous ills we have committed, if we refuse to make use of those means which the mercy of Providence has still preserved us for wiping away the shame and guilt with which we are now covered?"

Despite Pitt's tremendous speech, a spoiling amendment, "that the Slave Trade ought to be gradually abolished", was agreed by 230 votes to 85.

Regulations for the Slave Trade were considered. The Commons resolved that Abolition was to happen in 1796. But yet again the Lords struck.

The Lords campaign was led by the Duke of Clarence, afterwards William IV. The House of Lords resolved, on the proposal of Lord Chancellor Thurlow, that all the evidence had to be heard all over again in their Chamber, which inevitably dragged on into the following session of Parliament.

Pitt and Wilberforce fall out

The friendship of Wilberforce and Pitt was certainly not the last, nor the first, to be put under strain by war.

In 1794 Wilberforce spoke against Pitt's strategy in the Commons. This disagreement between the two was so amazing that Fox aspired to bring Wilberforce into the Opposition.

In March 1795, Pitt and Wilberforce met at a dinner, determined to settle their differences, made easier by Pitt changing policy, but the issue of abolition took second place to the French Revolutionary War.

Sierra Leone and Pitt's Fall from Office

Ever since the Mansfield judgement, questions as what to do about former slaves had grown. Many stayed with their previous masters as paid servants; but many did not. After the American War of Independence, the question arose, as to what to do with the emancipated slaves who had served with the British Army and were to be demobilised.

In 1786 there were proposals to transport them from London and resettle them in Sierra Leone. In the spring of 1787, hundreds of former slaves were landed at Sierra Leone. After many early difficulties, the capital was built at Freetown, under the administration of Zachary Macaulay, the father of the famous historian, who was a passionate abolitionist.

Hopes raised by the victory of the Nile in 1798 came to nothing with Ireland in rebellion; and we saw Pitt's "temporary" introduction of income tax, to meet the cost of the French War. But this did not bring Pitt down: the cause of Pitt's loss of office was the refusal of the King to allow Catholic emancipation. After 18 years, Pitt's administration came to an end. The new Prime Minister was Addington, a man of modest talents, who was not a great abolition enthusiast.

Wilberforce had to undergo more setbacks. In 1798, and again in the following year, he proposed his usual motion to introduce an anti-slave trade Bill, backed the first time by Fox and on both by Pitt. It met with failure on both occasions.

Minor Progress

Despite the defeats of 1798 and 1799, Wilberforce uncovered an Order in Council which, even though Britain and Spain were at war, permitted trade to continue between the West Indian colonies of the two countries, including slaves. Before his fall, this was something Pitt could sort out and after lobbying by Wilberforce, the Order was revoked.

However, Wilberforce was not successful with his Bill to protect the West African coast in the neighbourhood of Sierra Leone from slavers. The second reading was carried by the Commons but defeated in the Lords. Sierra Leone's liberated slaves remained in danger of being retrafficked.

In 1802, Wilberforce told the House that he would once more, at a future date, press the slavery question.

Two years later, when Pitt was back as Prime Minister after the interlude of the Peace of Amiens, needed by the country to stand up to Bonaparte, he did so.

1804-5

On 13th May 1804, Wilberforce yet again rose to ask for leave to introduce an Abolition Bill.

The intervention of Irish Members was decisive. They had no personal interest in the Slave Trade. The motion was carried by 124 to 49. But the Lords struck again: they adjourned the Bill until the next session.

1805 was an interesting year in politics. A major corruption scandal involving the navy (which came to nothing) but one in which Wilberforce spoke as a matter of conscience against Pitt's Government, led to a cooling of their relations.

The Battle of Trafalgar was won, but Napoleon was victorious at Ulm and Austerlitz.

And William Pitt died on the 23rd January 1806.

After Pitt's death there was the necessary change of Government. Wilberforce's Lords ally, Grenville, became Prime Minister, and his Ministry, known as that of "All-the-Talents", included Fox.

Grenville and Victory

The next move was a Bill to prohibit the importation of slaves by British ships into Colonies annexed by Britain during the war, or into any Colonies of a foreign state, and to prohibit the outfitting of foreign slave ships in British ports. This was carried even in the Lords.

Fox had made it clear and so had Grenville, that this Foreign Slave Bill would soon be followed by another for total abolition.

Fox moved for total abolition on the 10th June 1806.

The result was decisive, 114 votes to 15, the motion also being carried in the Lords.

With Fox's help in the same session, a Bill was also taken through Parliament to forbid slave trading in any ships not already being used for it.

Grenville now hit on a new tactic. After consultation with Wilberforce he decided to start the Bill in the Lords, the House in which he sat, and where it had failed so frequently. It was to be the first major legislation of the new session. Grenville lobbied hard, encouraging attendance, or to send in a proxy vote.

On the 2nd January 1807, on the Prime Minster's motion, "A Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade" was read for the first time, and ultimately carried by a 66 majority.

Its first clause stated that after the 1st May 1807, the African Slave Trade and "all manner of dealing and trading" in the purchase of slaves in Africa or their transport from Africa to the West Indies or "any other island, country, territory or place whatever" is "utterly abolished, prohibited and declared to be unlawful".

Then, in the Commons the Bill was taken up by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Howick, later "Earl Grey of the Reform Bill", and the Prime Minister at the time of the Slave Emancipation Act of 1833.

During February, the campaign went into lobbying overdrive, for the Commons. Lists of opponents, supporters and doubters were compiled – nothing was taken for granted. Out of 658 Members, "unknowns" were between 274 and 307; supporters between 210 and 265; and against, 80 – 104. The result was far from certain.

23rd February 1807 was to be a major Parliamentary occasion, the second reading. Solicitor-General Sir Samuel Romilly MP acknowledged Wilberforce.

He said:

"The feeling which must accompany my honourable friend from this House to his home, after the vote of this night shall have confirmed the object of his human and unceasing labours; when he retires to the bosom of his happy and delighted family, when he lays himself down on his bed, reflecting on the innumerable voices that would be raised in every quarter of the world to bless him, how much more pure and perfect felicity he must enjoy, in the consciousness of having preserved so many millions of his fellow-creatures..."

MPs were on their feet, giving Wilberforce an unprecedented standing ovation. It was the zenith of his career. Wilberforce was overwhelmed, in his place, head in hands, tears streaming down his face. The second reading was carried by the tremendous majority of 283 – 16, a huge majority of 267 – but clearly with many abstentions or absentees.

The Royal assent was given on 27th March 1807, and the Bill to abolish the slave trade was law, at last.

The elder statesman

Wilberforce's reputation was unmatched by any other, who had never held office.

In 1807, Parliament was yet again dissolved.

Wilberforce's rivals for the two Yorkshire seats, Lord Milton and Henry Lascelles, declared they intended to spend freely to win. Milton was a Whig, Lascelles a Tory.

Wilberforce, an independent, had no party money backing him. His opponents planned to lay out at least £100,000 each.

"We cannot desert Mr. Wilberforce", exclaimed one of his audience on nomination day, and forthwith pledged £500. Others took his example and the sum of £18,000 was promised, and money flowed in from every part of Yorkshire.

After four days of polling, Wilberforce was 111 ahead. His rivals fought dirty: lies; whispers; yobs to disrupt Wilberforce's meetings.

But the final count: Wilberforce, 11,806; Milton, 11,177; Lascelles 10,989. £70,000 had been pledged by Wilberforce's supporters. More than half could be returned, unspent.

Yorkshiremen rightly took pride in electing the man who had done so much for the world – even if this had nothing to do with their county.

Wilberforce Gives Up Yorkshire Seat

It was the needs of his family which led Wilberforce to stand down as Yorkshire's MP.

Before giving up his seat, Wilberforce spoke with his friends, including Mr Speaker, who was against it.

One idea was a seat with little or no obligations.

After thirty years, Wilberforce could not renounce politics. Mrs. Wilberforce's cousin, Lord Calthorpe owned the pocket borough of Bramber, on the Sussex coast. It was how Wilberforce was to remain in Parliament.

In the autumn of 1812, 28 years after first elected as County Member for Yorkshire, Wilberforce gave notice in the Northern Press.

A meeting of Yorkshire voters passed a resolution of thanks for his "unremitting and impartial attention to the private business of the county, and for his independent and honest performance of his trust on every public occasion".

"As freeholders of Yorkshire, resident in or near Hull, we indulge in the grateful feelings of an honest pride; we exult in the reflection that the illustrious names of those incorruptible patriots Marvell and Wilberforce, adorn our records and shed a lustre on this, the place of their nativity".

The continuing campaign

Of course, much remained to be done.

Among the issues that attracted Wilberforce were Parliamentary reform, Ireland and the Greek war of independence, but his main interest remained slavery. There was still almost everything to do.

On 15th June 1824, Wilberforce presented yet another petition in favour of the abolition of slavery. But the slaves had to wait two more years for emancipation. Wilberforce's work would be carried forward by others. This was his last Parliamentary contribution to the crusade he had begun, in 1787. Ten days after the debate he was taken ill again and for a month lay in a critical condition.

After 1825, Wilberforce's figure was to be seen no more at Westminster.

When Canning heard that he was finally to retire, he arranged the offer of a peerage for Wilberforce, but refusing, as he had turned it down before, Wilberforce said: "I have done nothing to make it naturally come to me".

Retirement

It was at this time that Wilberforce bought his house in Mill Hill, at Highwood Hill, where his eldest son proposed to farm, but unfortunately he was not very good at it and the family fortune ebbed away. Wilberforce lost a great part of his capital.

When his difficulties became known, wealthy friends offered to make up his losses, but Wilberforce would accept only enough to finish the building of his "Chapel-of-Ease" at Mill Hill. Wilberforce had to sell Highwood.

Wilberforce's last illness occurred in Cadogan Place, at his cousin's home. He died on 30th January 1833, three days after having learned, on his death bed, that Parliament had just given a third reading to the Bill to abolish slavery in British possessions; emancipating all the slaves in the Empire, the first country in the world to do so.

By the unanimous vote of Parliament, he was buried in Westminster Abbey, where he lies to this day near his old friends Pitt and Fox.

Observations of a modern day politician

It is interesting to see how many of the issues and problems confronting Wilberforce are similar to today. Whilst many things procedurally have changed, the fundamental principles of politics have not.

Wilberforce, early on, faced the choice of a ministerial or a backbench career. A combination of lack of opportunity (Pitt could not politically provide a job for Wilberforce when he became Prime Minister) and design by Wilberforce led to him being one of the most important politicians never to hold office in the period.

Nowadays, there is a growing recognition that a Ministerial career should not be the only career option open to MPs. Efforts are being made to develop a different track, through chairmanships of committees, for example.

Wilberforce's experiences also show how a persistent backbencher can achieve progress even on a major issue, but can only do so with the support of the Government of the day. Wilberforce was fortunate in both his choice of political friends, who were generally speaking always in office, and of issue.

The abolition of the slave trade also indicates how difficult and prolonged it can be, to introduce what is effectively private members' legislation, even if supported by the Government. There are many examples of modern day Private Members' Bills taking years to make progress.

Whilst Parliamentary procedure for Government business has radically changed over the last 200 years, particularly in eliminating some of the silly tactical games and introducing guillotines to push business along, little change appears to have

occurred in relation to private members' business, which is still very vulnerable to delaying tactics.

Looking at delaying tactics, it is fascinating to see how the House of Lords was able to frustrate the will of the elected House of Commons then, as now. This informs the need for major reform of the House of Lords, presently being considered by Parliament.

Wilberforce's story also demonstrates the core principle of politics: that it is a collective activity and one cannot achieve anything alone.

In this context, Wilberforce's political generation were developing the concept of party politics, as we know it. We can only speculate as to whether, with a modern party political whipping system the desire of Pitt, as Prime Minister, to achieve this important objective could have been delivered much earlier. The advantage of the party political system is that it can deliver a Government's agenda: the disadvantage is the question of whether adequate scrutiny is given.

Then, as now, political campaigning runs on money. It is interesting to note how much Wilberforce spent on political campaigning in his first election: in cash terms, it is not much less than the spending limit allowed 200 years later for a Parliamentary constituency.

We can also compare how much his political opponents were prepared to spend to defeat him. The figures talked about as being spent by Conservative opposition candidates to unseat Labour MPs in marginal seats, are identical in cash terms. But to multiply the figures up to today's values would produce astronomical sums, indeed, as the multiplier, the House of Commons library tells me, is 60!

Wilberforce's first campaign of £8-9,000 translates to about £½ million; and his opponents' £100,000 to £6 million – all for just one constituency!

This paper has not dealt with the question of the campaign in the country: there is no doubt that the political pressure generated by the widespread campaign for the abolition of slavery was brought to bear on parliamentarians, ultimately to deliver the Abolition Bill. Then, as now, even on the much reduced franchise in operation 200 years ago, politicians are sensitive to public opinion.

It is also fascinating to see how myths develop. Most people, I would suggest, believe Wilberforce to have been the MP for Hull: of course, for most of his Parliamentary career he was the MP for Yorkshire.

The myth has also grown, that Wilberforce more or less delivered the Abolition Bill single handed. It is clear that Wilberforce was part of a much wider team both in the country, involving people like Clarkson, and in Parliament, with heavyweight political backing from Pitt, Granville, Fox, Burke and many others.

And finally, it is also clear that the issues of 200 years ago regrettably are still very much alive today. The speech made by Pitt about Africa could be made today at the G8 conference.

The modern day slave trade of people trafficking for sex, domestic servitude, or unpaid labour is alive and growing, an issue confronting our Government and Parliament, now. Indeed, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which I chair, published a report in the autumn which has proved very influential in persuading the Government to adopt the European Council Convention against trafficking human beings, so far as the problem in the UK is concerned.

Regrettably, the old and evil slavery of Wilberforce's time still is alive in parts of Africa and Asia.

The campaigns Wilberforce and his colleagues began over 200 years ago are still relevant today. This is why the 200th anniversary is so important, and I welcome the exhibition at Parliament, the debates, and wealth of publications commemorating the achievement of 200 years ago and reflecting on the problems of today.

Thomas Clarkson, Wilberforce's Right Hand Man

SARAH WILLIAMS

Campaigns Officer, Anti Slavery International

I am going to talk about Thomas Clarkson's life and his work against the slave trade and slavery, but I will mainly focus on how he can inspire us in confronting the realities of contemporary forms of slavery today.

Thomas Clarkson's life and work

Thomas Clarkson was pivotal to the campaign in Britain to end the slave trade and slavery. He was born in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire in 1760, and went to St John's College, Cambridge. Although he was ordained a deacon, events shaped his future and his place in history.

In 1784, he won a Cambridge Latin essay contest that was to change his life. The question was "Is it right to enslave men against their will?" As he researched the subject he became appalled by what he found and he eventually decided to dedicate the rest of his life to the cause.

He translated his essay and took it to James Phillips, a printer and bookseller in London, to be published, and it sold well, providing more material for the abolitionist cause.

Through Phillips he met other abolitionists, including Granville Sharp, and learned what they had been doing to further the cause. Clarkson was convinced that once the British public was informed of the true horrors of the slave trade and of slaves' treatment in the colonies, their anger could be translated into action in Parliament.

This led to Clarkson and William Wilberforce's most famous early meeting in 1787. Clarkson asked Wilberforce to champion the cause in Parliament. Later that year, the movement progressed when Clarkson, Sharp and 10 others met to form a committee to work towards the ending the slave trade – the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

Clarkson was determined to gather proof of slavery's brutality for his books and pamphlets and as evidence for Wilberforce to use in Parliament. Over the following seven years he travelled 35,000 miles on horseback across Britain, including the major slave ports of Bristol and Liverpool; sometimes at risk to his life. He interviewed sailors and others involved in the slave trade.

After repeated setbacks, the campaign succeeded finally, in 1807, when Parliament passed The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

Clarkson and the other abolitionists carried on their work, turning their attention to ending slavery. Once again, he rode across the country to raise awareness and in 1833 the Emancipation Act was passed. Despite the victory, the struggle had not ended. The Act provided a stop-gap measure called apprenticeship. In reality, this was slavery by another name. In 1838, Clarkson sent a petition to Parliament calling for an end to this system by 1 August that year. It was signed by over 500,000 people and the system was outlawed on that day 1838.

Clarkson's efforts still did not cease even with slavery illegal, as it soon became clear that forms of slavery still existed worldwide. On 17 April 1839, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (as Anti-Slavery International was then known) was formed, to abolish slavery throughout the world. Clarkson was elected its first president.

Thomas Clarkson died in 1846 aged 86. His example has been an inspiration to anti-slavery campaigners throughout the centuries. Not only did Clarkson have a pivotal role in successfully bringing about the abolition of the slave trade and then slavery, he was then one of the founders and the first President of the organisation I now work for, Anti-Slavery International. And I now want to turn to what we can we learn from his methods and tireless campaigning in the fight against contemporary forms of slavery today.

So what do we mean by modern slavery?

For many people, the image that comes to mind when they hear the word slavery is of the transatlantic slave trade, and African slaves working on the plantations of America in centuries past. Even if we know nothing about the slave trade, it is something we think of as part of our history rather than part of our present. But the reality is that slavery continues today.

At least 12.3 million men, women and children around the world are forced to lead lives as slaves. Contemporary slavery takes various forms and affects people of all ages, sex and race.

Some common characteristics that distinguish slavery from other human rights violations are:
- *forced* to work -- through mental or physical threat;
- *owned or controlled* by an 'employer', usually through mental or physical abuse or threatened abuse;
- dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property';
- physically *constrained* or has restrictions placed on his/her freedom of movement.

First of all, **Bonded labour** affects millions of people around the world. People become bonded labourers by taking or being tricked into taking a loan for as little as the cost of medicine for a sick child. To repay the debt, they are forced to work long hours, without rest days. They receive basic food and shelter as 'payment' for their work, but may never pay off the loan, which can be passed down through several generations. One example of this is whole families bonded into agricultural work in Nepal.

Forced labour affects people for example illegally recruited by governments, political parties or private individuals, and forced to work - usually under threat of violence or other penalties. The Burmese government is notorious for perpetrating this kind of abuse. Also people were abducted into forced labour in the long civil war between North and South in Sudan.

An estimated 8.4 million children are in the **unconditional worst forms of child labour** worldwide. These are slavery practices such as trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, which are considered unacceptable and must be eradicated immediately. One example of the child slavery involves the trafficking of children into domestic work in countries including the Philippines.

Early and forced marriage affects women and girls who are married without choice and are forced into lives of servitude often accompanied by physical violence.

Descent-based slavery involves people being born into slavery on the basis of their class, caste or ethnicity, for example. They may be inherited or given as gifts. This still occurs in countries such as Mauritania and Niger in West Africa.

Human trafficking involves:
- Transporting people away from their communities
- Through violence, deception or coercion
- To enslave them in sexual exploitation or forced labour

Kamikar's story
35 year old Kamikar was kidnapped and forced to work as an agricultural labourer in the Sangrur District of the Punjab. Kamikar's father Amrik had worked as a bonded labourer for a landlord called Ram Singh for 12 years. In that time Amrik had never received a salary, only the occasional small loan. If he ever left his landlord to visit his family in his village, Ram Singh would charge him Rs100 for each day and night he was away. As a bonded labourer, Amrik was expected to be on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. After 12 years, Ram Singh demanded Rs 25,000 based on the interest on the very small loans Amrik had received.

With the support of a local organisation, Amrik eventually escaped from Ram Singh and went to work in a local brick kiln where he earned a daily wage. The landlord found him there and threatened to beat him, so Amrik fled to a local anti-slavery group, Volunteers for Social Justice, in nearby Phillaur.

Furious that his slave had escaped, Ram Singh sent five men to kidnap Amrik's son, Kamikar who was also working at the brick kiln. The men brought Kamikar back to the landlord's house where they beat him. He was forced to work for the landlord in place of his father until a warrant officer came to serve a writ on the landlord for Kamikar's kidnapping and enslavement.

Mila's story
Mila is now 23 years old, and started work as a child domestic at the age of nine. "During my time as a child domestic I worked for 11 employers. Only one of them gave me any salary, and that was just 500 pesos (US$9) a month," Mila says.

Each day she had to get up at 5.00am, to carry out household chores such as taking care of her employers' children, cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry and ironing. On top of this, her employers gave her additional work including helping out in a pre-school, making deliveries, and in one case, looking after pigs.

Conditions were bad, "in one place I lived in a shed, with no light, no mattress, and only one bucket of water a week for

washing." On two occasions she was sexually assaulted, once when she was 12 by her employer, a 70 year old man, and then when she was 15 by the brother of her then employer. After that, she ran away and found shelter with local organisation Visayan Forum, which provides assistance and support to child domestics.

Mila began volunteering for SUMAPI, the association of domestic workers set up by Visayan Forum, while she was in the shelter. In 2001, she was elected National President of the association and moved to Manila where she also continued her studies. In March 2005 she graduated from university and is now one of SUMAPI's three full-time employees.

People power: campaigning for change
So, rather than feeling overwhelmed and powerless by all these facts and stories about slavery, I now want to turn to what we can do about the problem, and how we can learn from Thomas Clarkson and the other abolitionists in our campaigning.

Petitioning, using logos, posters, images and testimonies, lobbying MPs, public meetings and consumer boycotts all contributed to the momentum that brought the slave trade to an end. Today we can use similar tools to campaign against slavery.

Research, testimonies and interviews
Through interviews with sailors who had worked on slave ships Clarkson fundamentally challenged the lies promoted by the pro-slavery lobby about the slave trade, and added strength to the calls for abolition. Such testimonies continue to have power today. A Sudanese woman called Mende Nazer has had her story published in the book Slave, where she gives her own account of her kidnapping and enslavement, first in Sudan and then in London. Many people have been moved by Mende's story to get involved in campaigning against modern-day slavery.

Images of anti-slavery
Clarkson's remodelled image of the slave ship the Brookes, loaded with 482 slaves, was produced as posters in 1789. They were widely distributed to a shocked public.

The 'Am I not a man and a brother?' image of an African man kneeling and raising his chained hands in supplication, was adopted as the anti-slavery movement's logo and used to brand publications, china, snuffboxes, cufflinks, bracelets, hairpins, medallions and banners. Wearing items which reproduced the image became both a political and a fashion statement.

Today, many campaigns use visual images, pins, badges and wristbands so that people can identify themselves with the campaign, and add their support to a popular cause. The Anti-Slavery International logo is on our website, publications, posters, t-shirts, and other materials, and people can wear our wristbands to show their commitment to the cause.

Petitions and the Declaration
Clarkson encouraged tens of thousands of people who signed petitions against the slave trade, including organising 519 petitions to Parliament in 1792. This showed popular support for abolition from across society, and building pressure on the Government to act.

By signing Anti-Slavery International's Declaration, you can become part of a new mass movement for change. By signing, you pledge to join the Fight for Freedom, supporting measures to commemorate the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its abolition, address its legacies, and work for the eradication of all forms of slavery today.

The role of Parliament
The groundswell of public opinion against the trade meant that Members of Parliament could not afford to ignore the view of ordinary people. Clarkson used this public backing to help him lobby Parliament, and of course it also helped Wilberforce in promoting the anti-slavery cause from within.

Now our MPs are elected by the British people, and we can hold them to account, ask them to listen to our views and take action on our behalf. Lobby your MP by writing them a letter, or arrange to meet them to discuss your concerns.

Public meetings
Clarkson rode around the country on a horse, galvanising public feeling against the slave trade. Groups of people across the country met to hear about the realities of the trade and to plan campaigning efforts. Meeting together as a group is still a very useful and informative way of engaging with the issues of slavery. Working with others motivates, inspires and enables us to share ideas and experience. You could think about organising an event to raise awareness in your church or community group, college, school or work place, or just with a group of friends.

Consumer power: lifestyle choices

Clarkson encouraged 300,000 people to boycott sugar and its products due to its being produced using slave labour. Today there are many ways we can act with our wallets to take a stand against slavery and injustice. For example we can buy fair and ethically traded goods where available.

Conclusion

Clarkson's campaign against the Transatlantic Slave Trade was successful, in a fairly short space of time. But he then continued to campaign for the abolition of Transatlantic slavery, which took another thirty years. And his involvement in founding the organisation that is now Anti-Slavery International shows his recognition that slavery continued to exist around the world in different and new forms. The fight against a multitude of contemporary forms of slavery is complex and long-term, and his example can still inspire and inform us.

John Newton, Mentor to William Wilberforce

MARYLYNN ROUSE

Director, The John Newton Project

(This paper is an edited transcript published with the permission of the speaker.)

This year marks the bicentenary of the death of John Newton. It is appropriate to consider the life of Newton and to examine his contribution to the anti-slavery campaign and, in particular, his relationship with William Wilberforce and his co- abolitionists.

The speaker has become absorbed in the study of Newton by her involvement in the transcription of a number of unpublished manuscripts. The John Newton Project was founded in 2002 to make this material widely available. The charity's objective is "the transformation of society through faith in Jesus Christ, using the life and works of John Newton as one great example".

Newton is best known for his hymn 'Amazing Grace' which describes his own conversion experience, his daily walk with God and his future hopes of heaven. What is becoming evident as these unpublished documents are being studied is Newton's influential role on his contemporaries rather than being seen simply as a provider of evidence about slavery.

Newton's early life was eventful. Born at Wapping in London, his very early years were influenced by his mother, who died when he was just six. After only two years schooling he joined his father at sea. On a visit to Chatham when aged 17 he met his future wife Polly who was then aged 13. He was press ganged into the navy to serve on a man of war. He deserted and after recapture he suffered lashing. He was a troublesome crew member and in the custom of the day was exchanged for a member of the crew of a merchant ship. He was then involved in the slave trade both at sea and on a small island off the West African coast. After being ill treated and suffering severe illness at Sierra Leone he returned to England. During a violent storm at sea and in fear of his life Newton prayed for the first time in many years, recalling words taught to him by his mother. The storm abated and for the next sixty years the anniversary of it, March 21st, was commemorated by Newton. Newton continued to work in the slave trade but after illness he left and become a customs official in Liverpool. During this period he continued to study the Bible and to learn from more mature Christians. After several years of unsuccessful applications to the Church of England he was eventually ordained when Lord Dartmouth offered him the curacy of Olney in Buckinghamshire.

It was at Olney that Newton became a link figure in the network of evangelicals and others, later to include Wilberforce, active not only in the movement for the abolition of slavery, but in the campaign to improve the moral climate of England. Examination of Newton's notebooks, correspondence, sermons and hymns disclose just how wide this network extended and how many of his contemporaries were influenced by him in different ways. To give some examples, at Olney Newton was a close friend of William Cowper with whom he would write a new hymn each week. Newton's calm way of exerting his influence is manifest in the case of Thomas Scott. Newton prayed for and gave encouragement to Scott over a three year period at the close of which Scott was fully committed and went on to become England's finest Bible commentator of the time. Newton visited also the Thornton family at Clapham and it was there that he first made the acquaintance of the young William Wilberforce who looked upon him as a father figure. John Thornton came to be a prominent supporter of Newton providing £200 pa. for Newton to provide hospitality at the vicarage for many visitors and to help the poor in Olney. Thornton later secured for him the living of St. Mary Woolnoth in the City of London.

Although his time was less at his own disposal in London, Newton continued to correspond with, amongst others, Henry Venn and Charles Simeon, offering comfort and guidance when needed and working alongside Simeon in his missionary initiatives.

Newton was a notable preacher. Realising during the commemorative performance of Handel's Messiah at Westminister Abbey in 1784 that, although impressed by the work, the audience lacked understanding of it, he preached 50 sermons, each based on a text used in the oratorio.

The effectiveness of his preaching is illustrated by the fact that when his friend Walter Taylor of Southampton asked him to preach to people from the suurounding villages. several hundred came to hear Newton in Taylor's laundry. Eventually Taylor had to build a special room, "Newton's Chapel" for him.

Newton's other writings also exerted an influence; for instance some lines in William Wordsworth's poem, The Prelude, are quoted directly from Newton's Authentic Narrative.

In 1785 the young William Wilberforce, in some mental turmoil during his own conversion experience, sought Newton's counsel. It was in Wilberforce's mind that the new life which he was contemplating would be incompatible with politics and that perhaps he should resign as an MP and enter the church. Newton persuaded him otherwise and convinced him that God would use his position in politics for the good of the nation. Newton is referred to frequently at this time in Wilberforce's diaries; in a letter to Newton, Cowper refers to Wilberforce as Newton's "new disciple". Newton introduced Wilberforce to Thomas Scott and to others who were to assist him in later life. Wilberforce and Newton exchanged correspondence of which more than eighty letters still exist. From this correspondence it is clear that the two men were in each others' company on the day of Wilberforce's celebrated declaration on the 28th October 1787 of the twin objects which God had set before him: "the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners". Wilberforce looked to Newton for advice in tackling these.

Once Wilberforce had embarked upon the parliamentary campaign against slavery, Newton's evidence, based upon his direct personal experience, was invaluable and Wilberforce enabled him to appear in person before the Privy Council and before a Select Committee of the House of Commons. A copy of Newton's written evidence was presented to each member of both houses of parliament. Newton's position as rector of St.Mary Woolnoth in London, where the Lord Mayor was one of his parishioners, enabled him to reach some of the very city merchants and bankers who might otherwise have been amongst the abolitionists' principal opponents. He organised prayer meetings to coincide with and in support of Wilberforce's anti-slavery debates in parliament.

In common with Wilberforce, Newton was concerned with the wider issue of the transformation of society. His hearers included the Gurney and Buxton families, whose own contributions to social reform were immense. Newton's work in this respect was not confined to England but embraced Australia, India and other overseas settlements through his support of chaplains and pioneer missionaries.

Newton, Wesley and Whitfield are considered by many to be the three principal evangelists of the eighteenth century. Newton continued to preach until shortly before his death. He was a father figure of the emerging evangelical church and laid the foundation for the people of the nation to change. It is towards a similar change in the nation today that the work of the Newton Project is directed.

William Wilberforce, His Retirement to Mill Hill and the Building of his Church

MICHAEL WORMS

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When William Wilberforce died in 1833, he was accorded the honour of burial in Westminster Abbey. A reading of the inscription on his memorial there provides a summary of his life and achievements. The couplet which refers to his life on leaving Parliament which states that in the evening of his days he ' withdrew from Public Life and Public Observation to the Bosom of his family' suggests a quiet peaceful retirement. Such an interpretation is misleading for it was in fact a period of great change in his circumstances and of conflict over the building of his chapel, now St.Paul's church here in Mill Hill.

Most biographies of William Wilberforce refer only briefly to this period and do so largely to illustrate his composure in the face of adversity. This is perhaps because the earliest biography, upon which subsequent authors have relied heavily was written by his sons soon after his death when feelings were still raw and the people involved were still alive. The object of the present talk is to expand a little upon his life at Mill Hill and to describe the building and early history of St.Paul's Church.

In all that he did, Wilberforce's sense of purpose is attributed to his deep faith which is usually dated to a profound conversion experience as a young man in his early twenties. It is recorded however that there had been a much earlier experience. At the age of nine his father died and Wilberforce was sent to live with his aunt and uncle in London. Here he was exposed to religious observance as preached by Methodists and Evangelicals. It was a brief exposure, for his mother called him back to Hull to return him to conformity. It is probable however that the experience remained with him and enabled him to work with conformist and non conformist alike and perhaps influenced the design and his expectations for his church.

The connection of Wilberforce with Mill Hill really started in 1824. Although the abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade had been accomplished in 1807, campaigning for the abolition of slavery itself continued to occupy Wilberforce in a leading role. It is often overlooked that Wilberforce's achievements were all won against a background of disability and sometimes severe pain. By 1824 he was tired and an especially severe bout of ill health led him to consider his future. A pressing need was to ensure the continuation of the parliamentary campaign. When Thomas Fowell Buxton undertook to do this Wilberforce was free to resign from Parliament and to retire.

He was at this time living at Gore House, Kensington, the site of the present Albert Hall. One can speculate that he had chosen this as his residence not simply because it was convenient for travel to Westminster but because the area was still rural and in its large garden he could find tranquillity and listen to bird song, including that of the nightingale. The outdoors, scenery, and nature, especially plants, were important to Wilberforce throughout his life. Although he had taken a 25 year lease on Gore House he would be aware that London was expanding rapidly with building encroaching to the south and east of his property. He sold the property to a Mr. Mortlock. Several months were spent seeking a new residence and he settled eventually on a recently available estate at Highwood Hill, some 10 miles NW of London. The property was situated on high ground with extensive views and easy access by road into London and to the north. It comprised house, garden, home farm and agricultural land of about 120 acres. Wilberforce purchased it outright and no doubt intended spending the remainder of his life there. An additional factor may have been the presence of a number of neighbouring estates occupied by influential people who held similar views to him own; notably his friend Sir Stamford Raffles who owned the adjoining property.

In the first year of his residence, Wilberforce was hardly at home. Active as ever he made an extended visit to his beloved Lake District and on his return he became once again involved with anti slavery meetings with his friend and associate Thomas Clarkson in a newly invigorated campaign. Above all he enjoyed his garden and walks in the countryside, the companionship of friends and his extended family for, soon after he came to Hendon Park, his eldest son William Jnr. and his wife moved in also.

There was however a drawback to his enjoyment – the distance of his house from the parish church at Hendon. The parish was long and narrow. Hendon Park was at the extreme northern edge and the church lay some three miles to the south along roads which were poor making travel in winter difficult. That the parish was perceived as of two halves, a north and a south, had been accepted for some time, as recognised by the appointment of a Headborough for each. Wilberforce had been under the impression, prior to his purchase of Hendon Park, that there was an intention to erect a chapel of ease at the northern end.

Nothing was actually in progress however, and when several months had passed Wilberforce felt that the only course open to him was to build a chapel on his own estate. This was possible under legislation recently enacted by a government aware of the growing population of London, the religious needs of which were being met, not by the established church, but by the nonconformists. To combat this, individuals were encouraged to build proprietory chapels at their own expense, of which they would remain as owner and to which they could appoint a minister of their own choosing. But, and it was a large but, to do so required the approval of the incumbent of the parish.

The incumbent of Hendon Parish at this time was the Rev.Theodore Williams. Early in 1828 Wilberforce made known to him his wish to build such a chapel. Williams, however, claimed that his own plans for a chapel of ease in the area, necessary because the parish church was too small, were well advanced. On hearing this Wilberforce set aside his own proposal, but when no chapel was forthcoming after several more months, he determined to proceed once again. A possible reason for Theodore Williams' inaction was that an alternative proposal to demolish the parish church and rebuild in a larger size was under consideration, making the need for a chapel unnecessary. Further discussion between the two men led to a compromise solution. Theodore Williams would agree to Wilberforce building a chapel, provided that it was not built on his own estate but further to the south where the local population was concentrated.

Acting upon this agreement Wilberforce submitted his plans to the Bishop of London. At this point however, it appears either that Williams was insincere or had had second thoughts. What is evident is that at this time clandestine opposition to Wilberforce's proposal began to emerge at Hendon. Meanwhile, the Church Commissioners in considering Wilberforce's proposal, broached the idea that instead of a proprietary chapel, the property of Wilberforce which the local inhabitants were invited to use, the chapel should have a district allocated to it, of which Wilberforce would have the right to appoint the minister, i.e. the patronage.

Patronage was at this period an important commodity. It had a financial value in that it could be bought, sold, or used as collateral for loans. It was of value also as a tool to influence churchmanship within an area, in that the patron could introduce a minister of whose churchmanship he approved. Indeed some rich laymen of evangelical persuasion were known to have purchased livings for that very reason. It is possible that Theodore Williams was apprehensive of such a move. The assignment of a District too would have had financial implications in that the income due to a minister depended upon pew rents, fees for occasional duties, such as weddings, and tithes based upon land area. At this time it was estimated that the income of Hendon parish was the considerable sum of £800-£1200. It has also been suggested that on a personal level Theodore Williams was a member of a slave owning family and not favourably disposed to the anti slavery movement represented by Wilberforce. Whatever the reason or reasons, on learning of the Commissioners proposal Theodore Williams reacted very strongly and encouraged open opposition to Wilberforce.

At first Theodore Williams resorted to appeals to the Bishop of London and to the Church Commissioners, claiming that he had been treated unjustly. In 1829 he and the patron of Hendon Church submitted a petition to Parliament in which they claimed that they were being deprived of their lawful property. Theodore Williams once again stated that his own plans for a chapel were advanced but that the Commissioners were not listening to him. A protracted and very public correspondence between Theodore Williams and the Bishop ensued. That it was in public clearly harmed Theodore's standing. A letter to the Evening Standard in June 1830 stated
"we are no admirers of Dr.Blomfield Bishop of London, as our readers may have discovered before this, but we own that in his correspondence, now published, with the Rev.T.Williams of Mill Hill, we see little ground to suspect His Lordship has been wrong in declining to permit that Rev.Gentleman to erect a new church and preside over its services at Mill Hill"

Wilberforce by now having the support of the Bishop of London had commenced building. The site as agreed with Theodore Williams, lay to the south on The Ridgeway in an old gravel working, on land donated by Sir Charles Flower of Belmont - a man rich through trade in the City of London, a major local landowner and a supporter of Wilberforce.

The building was to be constructed of brick. It was current practice to source building materials as close as possible to the construction site, in order to save the cost of transport. (As will be evident later, the cost of building had assumed great importance). Wilberforce knew that a kiln had existed at Hendon Park in the past and that deposits of brick earth occurred on his land. He therefore decided to make the bricks for his chapel on his own land. Brick making then was a relatively simple process carried out by a small team of workers using inexpensive equipment. Inevitably in a hand made process the bricks produced could vary in quality depending upon the firing process. Only the best quality would be used for building. As these bricks were being produced by Wilberforce, he was the supplier, but as it was he who was having the church built, he was at the same time the purchaser. He therefore embarked upon a simple book transaction whereby Wilberforce paid the builder for the work who in turn paid Wilberforce for the bricks, the architect determining the prices and costs involved.

Theodore Williams' attacks on Wilberforce had by now become more personal, and in the making and purchase of the bricks he saw further opportunity to advance his claims to the patronage and his opposition to the assignment of a District.

Theodore's attack was two pronged. He questioned the quality of the bricks suggesting that inferior bricks were being used in the building and claimed also that the financial arrangements for their purchase were suspect. These two claims called into question the integrity of Wilberforce.

A flurry of correspondence ensued much of it published in the newspapers of the day. Wilberforce himself was clearly distressed by it and wrote privately to his friends. He declined however to respond in public. His son, William Jnr., was not so reticent and wrote a letter to The Times, which provided Theodore Williams with an opportunity to attack both father and son once again. Letters of refutation from builders, brick makers, site manager and the architect, Samuel Flood Page, added to the fray, which continued through 1830, but by this time the building had been completed.

This dispute concerning the bricks has led to a persistent local rumour that the building itself was of poor quality and has been used to suggest that rather than repair the building ,it should be demolished and rebuilt. During recent works however samples have been tested and found satisfactory and Wilberforce himself was sufficiently confident of their quality to have his initials stamped on each one.

When Wilberforce entered upon the building of his chapel he was confident that he would be able to finance it, although in a letter to Hannah More, he intimated that it would be a strain on his finances. His income from the properties left to him by his father and his uncle has been estimated at £10,000 a year. His lifelong philanthropy had however made serious inroads. He had decided against a business career, had not sought to increase his assets, had reduced the rents of his tenants and is believed to have given away 50 percent of his income each year to charitable causes. He had borne all of his own expenses during his parliamentary career because at that time MPs were unpaid. At the time of his move to Mill Hill he was still supporting his family. His eldest son and wife lived with him, his second son was as yet without a living, two other sons were at university and his daughter unmarried. He had also settled sums on each of his children and made them a yearly allowance.

Wilberforce was not therefore in a position to withstand a great additional strain placed upon him by his eldest son. William Jnr. had been unsuccessful at university and a law career had proved too stressful. He had moved to Mill Hill where his father had hoped that he would manage the estate by way of occupation and become a gentleman farmer. Unfortunately William Jnr. became involved in a scheme proposed by a Major Close to create a large dairy complex near St.John's Wood which was designed to supply the expanding metropolis with fresh milk. The enterprise was ahead of its time and failed, leaving William Jnr. with debts of some £50,000.(several millions today). His creditors were pressing. At that time debt was a matter of imprisonment and in order that his son should avoid this, Wilberforce undertook to pay off the creditors. To do so required that William Snr. sell most of his property including his birth place in Hull and his estates in Yorkshire with the exception of Markington Hall. This did not leave him destitute but he decided that he could no longer afford the expense of Hendon Park. He left Mill Hill in 1831. He with his wife, spent the remaining two years of his life in the homes of his sons. The estate was at first rented out in its entirety but later divided and sold. The house, Hendon Park, was purchased by successive owners many of whom retained a link with St.Paul's Church. It later had institutional use until demolition and the houses of Crown Close were built upon the site. Although there is now no evidence of the house,the magnificent cedar which would have been familiar to Wilberforce remains as does his ornamental pond and woodland.

The chapel meanwhile remained empty and unused. Indeed, the interior may have been unfinished. Hearing of Wilberforce's financial difficulties, a number of friends and indeed old adversaries offered financial assistance. Wilberforce refused all except donations towards the completion of his chapel. Among the donations made was the magnificent painted window by Charles Muss – presented by a Mr.Mortlock, presumably the purchaser of Gore House some nine years previously. Among other items recorded as gifts was the church plate given by Baron Bexley, this is dated 1830 and clearly consecration was expected at that time. Theodore Williams was however still persisting in his opposition and clearly had managed to delay consecration. It was in fact delayed until August 1833 just a few days after Wilberforce's death. Wilberforce had however appointed the first minister Rev.J.Brown and the first churchwardens. It is also probable that the dedication to St.Paul was due to Wilberforce as St.Paul was greatly admired by him.

Although the church was now consecrated, a minister appointed and a District allocated, Theodore Williams persevered with his campaign to gain possession of the patronage. Eventually the matter came to court and once again the bricks and other building materials became of relevance. It was a condition of the grant of patronage to Wilberforce that he deposit a sum equal to five per cent of the building costs as an endowment of the chapel. Wilberforce left this matter in the hands of his lawyers. They appear to have struck out some of the building costs prior to calculating this five per cent. Theodore Williams was therefore able to claim on this technicality that the endowment conditions had not been met. By this time the patrons, Wilberforce sons and son-in-law, appear to have decided to discontinue the fight and in 1840 Theodore Williams at last gained the patronage at a cost of £1,999. (A later legal commentator suggested that Williams may have known that his own claim was doubtful why else would he pay so much for something which he believed was his by right). The Wilberforce family appear to have lost interest in the building and there are only two records of a member of

the family returning to the church.

The first minister too left shortly after Theodore Williams became patron and in his place came the Rev.Bartholomew Nicols as perpetual curate who, during his incumbency of more than 30 years, established St.Paul's as the focus of life in what by virtue of its possession of a church, was now the village of Mill Hill. From Nicols' notes and accounts it seems that the interior of the church was in a poor state. He paid for much of the repair and provided minor furnishings. He supported the school, (established in 1834,) started the first lending library in the district as well as attending to the spiritual needs of the villagers. His incumbency cannot have been easy for Theodore Williams' claims to the fees etc. were pursued assiduously. Williams' need for money appears to have determined much of his actions in relation to the chapel. He later mortgaged the patronage for £2,000 increased a little later by a further £1,200 as security for his heavy borrowing. It was however of little avail for he was subsequently imprisoned for debt. His release was obtained by his old adversary the Bishop of London who agreed to the sequestration of the living of Hendon to pay off the debt. Williams remained as Vicar of Hendon for many more years but now with a much reduced stipend. The patronage was later acquired by and passed to subsequent incumbents of St. Paul's and passed eventually to the Bishop of London with whom it remains.

Wilberforce may indeed have expected his retirement to be relatively peaceful in the bosom of his family at Mill Hill. In the event however what he probably considered to be simply another philanthropic act – the provision of a place of worship and spiritual guidance for his neighbours, proved to be a prolonged struggle. It is equally probable that were he to have envisaged that his church was to play a significant role in the area for 175 years and continues to do so, he would have considered that struggle worthwhile.

Wilberforce, Friend of Humanity and his Enduring Influence

KEVIN BELMONTE

Author and Biographer

The evening of February 23, 1807, was unforgettable. In the British House of Commons, debate had started on the Second Reading of a bill calling for the abolition of the British slave trade. For 20 years, similar bills had been introduced again and again only to go down to defeat.

But this night would be different. As the debate began, one member of Parliament after another rose to praise the man who had refused to accept defeat in his efforts to secure the abolition of the trade—William Wilberforce.

The scene was electric. Before one member had finished speaking, others jumped to their feet, wishing to add their voices to the overwhelming tide. One the last to speak was Sir Samuel Romilly.

In the conclusion of his speech, Romilly contrasted the French Emperor Napoleon with Wilberforce. He painted a picture of the reception each man would receive when they returned home. Napoleon, he said, would arrive in pomp and power, yet as one whose dreams would be haunted by the oppressions of war. Wilberforce, meanwhile, would return to "his happy and delighted family and remember that the slave trade was no more."

At this, the Commons stood as one man, turned to Wilberforce, and cheered. Applause echoed throughout the chamber. Wilberforce sat in his place, head bowed, and wept. Then the Commons voted, by an overwhelming majority, to abolish the British slave trade—283 to 16.

Wilberforce's triumph was described by distinguished historian G.M. Trevelyan as "one of the turning events in the history of the world." Abraham Lincoln also paid tribute to Wilberforce. "I have not allowed myself to forget...the abolition of the slave trade by Great Britain," he wrote in 1858. "School-boys know that Wilberforce...helped that cause forward...[W]ho can now name a single man who labored to retard it?"

These tributes notwithstanding, Wilberforce is for many a forgotten man. In recent years, however, there has been renewed interest in Wilberforce. It is my privilege today to tell you something more about this remarkable man—one who most richly deserves an enduring place in our cultural memory.

Wilberforce had a disruptive childhood. His father, Robert, died when he was eight. Soon after, his mother, Elizabeth, was stricken with a life-threatening fever. Within a few years, two of his three sisters had died. Wilberforce went to live with his father's elder brother, William, and his wife Hannah.

This childless couple lavished love upon their grieving nephew and made him their heir. They introduced him to many of their friends, most of whom were evangelical Christians—as they were. Wilberforce grew especially close to John Newton the former slave trader we know today as the author of *Amazing Grace*.

As a young man, Newton was pressed into a king's ship and rated as a midshipman. He deserted, was flogged, and demoted to the rank of common seaman. At times he was consumed by bitterness. Again, he deserted and became the overseer of a slave depot on the Plantain Islands near Africa.

But Newton had not yet reached bottom. Within a few years, he was himself enslaved by a corrupt slave trader and from 1746-48, forced to work on a lime plantation. Remarkably, his father learned of his fate and was able to engineer his rescue.

As with the prodigal son, Newton cried out to God in his despair, and embraced the Christian faith taught to him by his mother—who had died when he was just six years old. Tragically, however, Newton had not at this point in his life become the opponent of slavery he later became. Through his father's agency, he was placed as first mate on a slave ship. In 1750, he received the command of a slave ship.

Newton's gradual transformation continued. He left the sea a few years later for health reasons. His years of mistreatment

when he was himself a slave had taken their toll. At the same time, he felt a call to pastoral ministry, and was ordained a minister in the Church of England in 1764.

Deeply penitent, and filled with profound remorse, Newton grew to be an outspoken opponent of the slave trade he had once served. His subsequent generosity and charitable giving became a byword among the poor parishioners he served and beyond. During this period, Newton met Wilberforce's uncle and aunt.

Now, much as Wilberforce would have liked to stay with William and Hannah—and enjoy ongoing visits with John Newton—he only stayed with them for two years. His mother, Elizabeth, who had survived her dangerous fever, deeply distrusted evangelicals, whom she considered religious fanatics. Her view was widespread among the middle and upper classes. When it became clear from letters that Wilberforce had adopted his aunt and uncle's religious views, she took him back home.

She and Wilberforce's paternal grandfather harbored family dynastic ambitions. Wilberforce's grandfather had twice served as the Mayor of Hull. A close cousin was member of Parliament. His family was growing in wealth and influence. Perhaps someday he might be elected to Parliament. What was certain, was that he was expected to build upon the promising foundation that had been established. He would never do this if he, in their eyes, remained "a bigoted, despised methodist." They would make him the young man they thought he ought to be.

By the time Wilberforce entered St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1776 his faith had so withered on the vine as to be non-existent. Biographer Robin Furneaux has described what he was like at this time:

> [Wilberforce] had grown up to be a very charming young man. He was small, [a] little over five feet...and so slight that he inspired such whimsical descriptions as "all Soul and no body." None of his features were handsome, but they had a liveliness which was attractive....[H]e was seldom still. His conversation followed the same pattern. He would pick up an idea very quickly, play with it, and turn to another....with a speed and pleasure which entranced his listeners.
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> He took an obvious and innocent joy in meeting people, in talking to them and exchanging ideas. [In addition to] polished manners, his mind was so quick that his contemporaries found it difficult to gauge his intellectual powers....[I]t was to be many years before it could be seen what he might achieve when he immersed himself in a subject....[H]e abandoned himself to a life of pleasure for which his wealth...and charm made him perfectly equipped.

Wilberforce hardly ever attended lectures at Cambridge, choosing instead to entertain friends, gamble for high stakes and drink far into the night. Nevertheless, his keen intelligence enabled him to do well, though with little effort, in English literature and the Greek and Latin classics. He would later voice keen regret that he had squandered the benefits of a university education.

Instead, by 1780, near the end of his time at Cambridge, Wilberforce had formed a friendship with William Pitt, who within a few years would become the youngest Prime Minister in British history. They would go together to hear the great debates in the House of Commons on the war with America. Both young men thought the war had been disastrous for Britain, and both resolved to seek political office and set things right.

Wilberforce also wanted to make a name for himself. "I was very ambitious," he wrote at this time, and "distinction was my darling object." He had truly become the son and grandson his mother and grandfather wished him to be.

Pitt, whose father, Lord Chatham, had been one of England's great political leaders, had been groomed for the Prime Minister's office since boyhood. Wilberforce was starting from much further back in terms of training, experience and social standing, but he made up for lost time by winning election to the House of Commons before Pitt—within days of his 21st birthday. Two months later, Pitt joined him there.

The two friends were as close as brothers. Pitt stayed with Wilberforce for months at a time, and treated Wilberforce's home, Lauriston House, as his own. They traveled together to France, where they were entertained at the court of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. They dined and discussed politics with Benjamin Franklin and the Marquis de Lafayette.

Wilberforce became a highly sought after guest at lavish dinners and soirees. The Prince of Wales, he was told, would go

anywhere to hear him sing. Always a shrewd gambler, he often won large sums of money. He was a rising political star who reveled in the heady knowledge that a merchant's son had won his way into the highest social circles.

Wilberforce's parliamentary eloquence was such that he could devastate those who tangled with him or sought to oppose Pitt in the Commons. Sometimes his attacks were so vehement that Pitt had to rein him in. Pitt's great opponent Charles Fox hated Wilberforce for a time because he lobbed rhetorical bombs with such frequency and effect.

Late in 1783, Pitt was appointed Prime Minister, but knew he would have to call for new elections as his support in the Commons was weak and needed shoring up. Here, Wilberforce's ambition served Pitt well.

For years, the two parliamentary representatives for the County of Yorkshire had been determined by the landed aristocrats who commanded such wealth and influence there. Not even Pitt believed their dominance could be successfully challenged.

But that is just what Wilberforce did. Against all odds, he won election as a Member of Parliament for Yorkshire. In fact, his upset victory was so decisive, that another supporter of Pitt won the second seat for Yorkshire. Elections throughout the country went Pitt's way because of the momentum Wilberforce's victory had set in motion. Wilberforce had arrived politically.

A brilliant future did indeed lie ahead, but not the one many predicted for Wilberforce.

THE GREAT CHANGE

Everything changed when Wilberforce decided to set out on a continental tour of Europe in the fall of 1784. Since his mother, sister and cousin Bessy Smith would be traveling together in a coach, he needed a companion who could keep things lively and interesting.

Unexpectedly, Wilberforce's first choice for a traveling companion bowed out. At a loose end, Wilberforce went to the horse races at Scarborough. There he fell in with his former childhood tutor, Isaac Milner. Milner, a brilliant mathematician, was a Fellow of the Royal Society (of Science). Glad to see an old friend, Wilberforce impulsively invited Milner to join him on his tour of Europe.

What Wilberforce did not know then, was that his grandfather had actually intended years before that Milner accompany him on such a tour. Yet nothing had come of it then.

Neither did Wilberforce know that Milner, while learned and lively in conversation, also possessed a deep belief in evangelical Christianity. Wilberforce discovered this when he railed against a clergyman they both knew as "one who took things too far." Wilberforce was now a religious skeptic, and had rented a pew at Theophilus Lindsey's Unitarian Chapel on Essex Street in London.

An animated conversation ensued. Wilberforce playfully ridiculed evangelicals, to which Milner responded: "Wilberforce, I don't pretend to be a match for you in this sort of running fire, but if you wish to discuss this subject seriously, I shall be happy to do so."

Wilberforce agreed thinking he could easily demolish Milner's arguments and that this would provide an entertaining diversion. What he soon discovered, was that Milner could articulate a cogent and winsome case for Christianity—one he could not lightly dismiss or easily refute. The conversations continued and Wilberforce became increasingly reflective.

Shortly thereafter, Wilberforce noticed a book his cousin had left lying open on a table. He picked it up, and asked Milner if he had ever heard of Philip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul.* Milner said he had, and that Doddridge's book was "one of the best ever written. Let's take it with us, and read it on the rest of our journey." Wilberforce agreed, and over the next few months they carefully read *Rise and Progress* along with the Greek New Testament—to see if what Doddridge had written was true to the scriptures.

Now, neither Wilberforce nor Milner, knew that Bessy Smith had been given this book by the Rev. William Unwin, a close friend of John Newton, who had never ceased to pray that Wilberforce would someday come back to his boyhood faith. Newton did not know of Unwin's gift of Doddridge's book, but as it turned out, Newton's prayers were being answered through it.

By the time Wilberforce's tour of Europe concluded in October 1785, he was no longer a religious skeptic. Having thoroughly discussed with Milner his various doubts, he now possessed "a settled conviction in my mind, not only of the truth of Christianity, but also of the scriptural basis of [its] leading doctrines..."

But while this was true, he still had to wrestle with the implications of what it meant to embrace Christianity. He wrote: the deep guilt and black ingratitude of my past life forced itself upon me in the strongest colours...I condemned myself for having wasted by precious time, opportunities and talents." Wilberforce was experiencing, as St. Augustine had centuries before, the restlessness of a heart that had yet to find its rest in God. For a while he seriously considered forsaking politics. He described his feelings: "I must awake to my dangerous state, and never be at rest till I have made my peace with God."

In need of counsel, Wilberforce decided to seek out John Newton—a decision not easily made. He remembered his youth, how he had been separated from his aunt and uncle, and told that the faith he had embraced was scandalous and hated. He feared that a renewal of his friendship with Newton would make him an outcast in his political and social circles.

Wilberforce's re-connection with Newton at this time, and its wider significance, was a most remarkable providence.

For it was Newton who was so instrumental in setting Wilberforce on the path to abolition. That he should have played this role was an act of amazing grace—one that had transformed a wretch like Newton into the wise parson who counseled a young Wilberforce to consider what God might have him do in British politics.

When Wilberforce and Newton met, they had a lengthy conversation. Wilberforce was greatly moved when Newton confided to him his enduring belief that Wilberforce would someday turn back to God. "When I came away," Wilberforce wrote, "my mind was in a calm, tranquil state—more humbled—looking more devoutly up to God."

Wilberforce had found peace, and something else of equal value—wise, practical advice. Newton had urged Wilberforce "to avoid...widely separating from old friends...to keep up [your] connection with Pitt, and to continue in Parliament." Over time, Wilberforce realized how right Newton had been, and gained a profound sense that God could use him in political life.

Given Wilberforce's celebrated leadership of the 20-year fight to abolish the British slave trade, Newton's advice can be seen at its true worth. So too can the advice of the Rev. John Scott, whom Wilberforce sought out soon after speaking with Newton. As Scott recalled many years later in 1807, "I [then] withstood with all my energy [the] counsel [that] Mr. Wilberforce...retire from public life. Had that counsel been followed, the slave trade might have been continued to future generations."

On Easter 1786, John Newton wrote to his friend William Cowper, the poet with whom he had collaborated on the classic work, *Olney Hymns*. "I judge [Wilberforce] is now decidedly on the right track....I hope the Lord will make him a blessing both as a Christian and a statesman. How seldom do these characters coincide!! *But they are not incompatible*."

Henceforth, the course of Wilberforce's life would be very different. He later described what he came to call his "great change" in terms at once eloquent and philosophical.

> "[I]t is scarce too strong to say, that I seem to myself to have awakened...from a dream, to have recovered, as it were, the use of my reason after a delirium. In fact, till then I wanted first principles; those principles at least which alone deserve the character of wisdom, or bear the impress of truth.
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> Emulation, and a desire of distinction, [had been] my governing motives; and ardent after the praise of my fellow-creatures, I quite forgot that I was an accountable being; that I was hereafter to appear at the bar of God; that if Christianity were not a fable, it was infinitely important to study its precepts, and when known to obey them....
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> I am not now what I ought to be; yet I trust...through the help of that gracious Being who has promised to assist our weak endeavours, to become more worthy of the name of Christian...more active in the discharge of the various duties of that state in which the Providence of God has placed me."

In the year that followed his great change, Wilberforce came to understand how important it was to "watch and pray, [to] read the word of God, imploring that true wisdom which may enable [one] to comprehend and fix it in [one's] heart, that it may gradually produce its effect...renewing the mind and purifying the conduct."

By 1787, Wilberforce's call to service in political life had been profoundly re-directed. He realized that he was called to serve something larger than self. "It is my constant prayer," he wrote, "that God will enable me to serve Him more steadily, and my fellow-creatures more assiduously."

To his mother, who had been greatly alarmed to learn that her son had once more embraced evangelical Anglicanism, he wrote a long letter setting forth the first principles that guided him for the rest of his life.

> "It is not, believe me, to my own imagination, or to any system formed in my closet, that I look for my principles....[They] are derived from our great Master's own words; 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God will all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself."

"Who is my neighbour?" Wilberforce asked rhetorically. He stated that he took his cue from the parable of *The Good Samaritan*. "It is evident," he wrote, "that we are to consider our peculiar situations, and in these do all the good we can."

Wilberforce discovered the great work of his life on Sunday, October 28, 1787. On that day, he had met with John Newton. The two friends talked for a long time. They spoke of the great needs that existed in Britain and the evils of the slave trade. Wilberforce now saw his path clearly. After Newton left, he took up his quill pen, and wrote in his diary: "God has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners [i.e. morals]."

During the next 47 years. the range of Wilberforce's reforming endeavors and achievements was amazing. Instrumental in the abolition of the slave trade—and later slavery itself throughout the British Empire, he was active on many other fronts. He led, or was a member, of at least 70 different benevolent societies. He promoted educational reform, prison reform, and the promotion of public health initiatives. He championed shorter working hours, improved conditions in factories, and charities for Native Americans. He helped found the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, as well as Britain's National Gallery (of Art).

Often faced with bitter and at times violent opposition, Wilberforce was physically assaulted, received death threats, and was once challenged to a duel by a slave ship captain whose crimes he had denounced in the House of Commons. He refused this challenge on the basis of Christian principle.

Wilberforce fought vehemently for justice and integrity, at times even opposing his close friend, Prime Minister Pitt, in grave matters. It grieved Wilberforce to stand against him, but he held that "the Author of all moral obligation has enjoined us to renounce certain actions, without an inquiry as to reasons or consequences."

I would like to fast forward here a bit, and discuss John Newton's relationship with Wilberforce near the end of Newton's life. For Newton, the former slave ship captain whose life had so wonderfully changed, was to the end a testimony to amazing grace. Newton and Wilberforce, these two unlikely friends, were able to rejoice together in March 1807, when at long last, the British slave trade was finally abolished.

Newton, who marveled that he had lived long enough to see this day, died a short time later. 'At last,' as Wilberforce had written to Newton near the end, '[I] can join with you in the shout of victory.'

The same scenario repeated itself once more in Wilberforce's own life, for three days before he died, he learned that Parliament had voted to abolish slavery throughout Britain's colonies. Wilberforce's friends in the House of Commons knew he was gravely ill, and rejoiced that he had lived to see this day. "Wilberforce," Lord Stanley said, "can now depart in peace."

The passage of this measure had a profound effect in America. For when the news of it reached the United States, William Lloyd Garrison and his colleagues capitalized on its momentum by formally establishing the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Indeed in the weeks before Wilberforce's death, Garrison had met with Wilberforce in England to discuss the state of the American abolitionist movement. Of this historic meeting, Garrison had written, "[it was] too delightful and too important ever to be forgotten by me—I bade him farewell, expressing my fervent wishes for a long continuance of his valuable life, and my hope to meet him in that world of glory where change, and decay, and separation are unknown."

As I researched the materials that went into writing Wilberforce's life, I found it astounding that his story really began, in the most unlikely of ways, back with John Newton—that Newton's life story was so deeply connected with Wilberforce's, and Wilberforce's in turn with William Lloyd Garrison. Finally, through Garrison, this ongoing story crossed the sea to America, as it were.

And here it should be said that Wilberforce influenced many prominent African-Americans in the early nineteenth-century, among them William Wells Brown, Paul Cuffe and Benjamin Hughes. Yet nowhere, so far as I have learned, has the indebtedness of Africa's sons and daughters to Wilberforce ever been more eloquently stated than by Frederick Douglass, who wrote:

> "[M]en have in their own hands the peaceful means...of making this world a healthy and happy dwelling place, if they will but faithfully and courageously use these means.
>
> The world needed...a revelation of the power of conscience and of human brotherhood....The friends of freedom in England saw in the Negro a man, a moral and responsible being...[T]hey, in the name of humanity, denounced the crime of his enslavement, It was the faithful, persistent and enduring enthusiasm of...William Wilberforce...and [his] noble co-workers, that finally thawed the British heart into sympathy for the slave, and moved the strong arm of that government in mercy to put an end to his bondage.
>
> Let no American, especially no colored American, withhold a generous recognition of this stupendous achievement. What though it was not American, but British....[I]t was...a triumph of right over wrong, of good over evil, and victory for the whole human race."

Postscript

Had William Wilberforce visited Mill Hill just five years ago, he would have had little difficulty in recognising from the outside St. Paul's Church as being his chapel. It would have been evident though that the building had suffered from weathering in its exposed position on the Ridgeway. It is unlikely however that he would have recognised the interior for successive congregations have 'added to' what had been a relatively simple space designed primarily for preaching.

During this past five years, the present congregation realised that the building was in need of restoration. At the same time they recognised that, in its under used crypt space lay an opportunity not simply for this restoration but for the creation of a centre for use by the community and from which the work of Wilberforce could be made known.

Today, as this booklet is published, that vision has been realised. The church interior has been sensitively restored to a state more closely resembling the original. The Wilberforce Centre, created in the crypt space, was formally opened by The Rt. Hon. Richard Chartres, Bishop of London, on the 8th. June 2008; the 175th anniversary of the consecration of the church.

Michael Worms, August 2008

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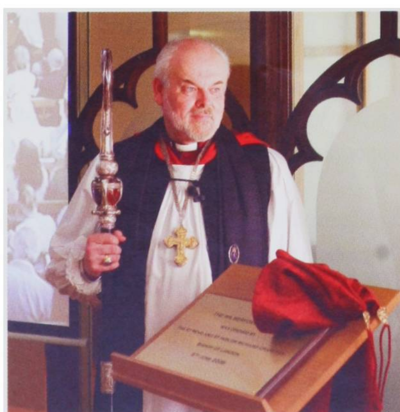


M. Thompson

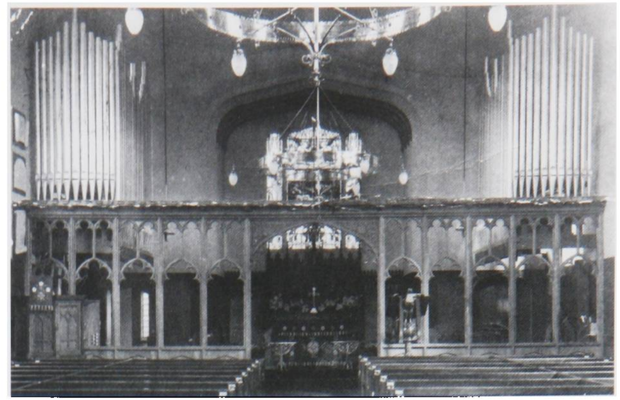
Opening of The Wilberforce Centre by The Bishop of London,
The Rt. Revd. and Rt. Hon. Dr. Richard Chartres.

St Paul's Church
The Ridgeway, Mill Hill, London NW7 1QU

www.stpaulschurchmillhill.co.uk

St. Paul's Archive

1. Exterior view of church prior to 1906. A view familiar to Wilberforce.



St. Paul's Archive

2. Interior c. 1906 showing addition of organ and screen.

M. Worms

3. Exterior 2008

M. Thompson

4. Interior 2008, a return to a more simple layout, characteristic of the Original