



**set all free**

**ACT TO END SLAVERY**

ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE ACT  
BICENTENARY 2007

**setting the scene**

**for**

**2007**

**set all free** is a project of Churches Together in England

## **DATES**

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- 1562 First English slaving expedition by Sir John Hawkins
- 1619 First recorded cargo of Africans landed in Virginia
- 1625 First English settlement on Barbados
- 1626 First boatload of African slaves to St. Kitts
- 1631 Charles I granted monopoly on Guinea trade to a group of London merchants
- 1655 British capture of Jamaica as part of Cromwell's 'Grand Design'
- 1672 Royal Africa Company granted charter to carry Africans to the Americas
- 1772 Slavery declared illegal in England, Wales & Ireland (the Somerset case)
- 1778 Slavery declared illegal in Scotland
- 1781 Over 100 African slaves thrown overboard from the slave ship *Zong*
- 1783 Committee on the Slave Trade established by Quakers' Meeting for Sufferings
- 1787 Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded: Granville Sharp as president of a mostly Quaker committee
- 1791 23 August - St Domingue (Haiti) slave revolt
- 1792 Resolution for gradual abolition of the slave trade defeated in House of Lords
- 1805 Bill for Abolition passed in Commons, rejected in House of Lords
- 1807 25 March - Slave Trade Abolition Bill passed in the British Parliament
- 1808 US abolished the slave trade
- 1833 Abolition of Slavery British Empire Bill passed, with effect from 1834 and providing for up to six year 'apprentice' transition  
£20M voted as compensation to slave owners
- 1838 1 August - enslaved men, women and children in British Empire became free
- 1842 Britain & US signed Webster-Ashburton Treaty, banning slave trade on high seas
- 1848 Emancipation by the French of their slaves
- 1850 The Fugitive Slave Law passed in the United States
- 1865 Slavery finally abolished in United States territories
- 1888 Slavery abolished in Brazil

## THE TRANSATLANTIC TRADE

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Since ancient times, it had been regarded as legitimate to trade in slaves, that is human beings who are regarded as somebody else's property, owned as forced, unpaid labour. Slaves might be prisoners of war, criminals, people sold to cover a debt, or children born into slavery.

Slaves are regarded as a separate class of people in society in the texts of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Among Mayans and Aztecs, Sumerians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, slaves were a fact of life. The word 'slave' comes from 'slav', enslaved people in Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade exceeded in numbers, brutality and organisation anything the world had previously seen.

Between 1450 and 1850, at least 9 - 12 million Africans were shipped from Africa across the Atlantic to colonies in North America, South America, and the West Indies. Of these Africans 80% (at least 7 million) were exported during C18th, with a mortality rate of 10 - 20% on board ship. This was the notorious Middle Passage.

... soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me.

Olaudah Equiano

Ships working the Triangular Trade started and finished in European ports. They carried copper, muskets, manufactured goods, glassware and cloth. They traded them for slaves who were loaded into extremely cramped ships and given only minimal amounts of food and water.

The demand for the slaves was high in the New World: labour was short, there were insufficient indigenous workers, and they could not withstand the diseases brought in by Europeans or the brutal working conditions. Sugar cane, which needed a hot climate, was becoming popular in Europe and was labour-intensive. So slaves were sold to dealers, and on to plantation owners. Sugar, rum, rice, coffee, cotton and tobacco from the Caribbean and the southern states of America were loaded onto ships which then returned to Europe completing the Triangle. From the outset Africans defied transatlantic slavery; they fought to avoid capture and resisted to the point of death on board slave ships. Moreover, they continued their struggle against slavery in the Americas through acts of passive and active resistance.

Most Europeans never saw the Middle Passage and remained ignorant of its inhumane and deadly conditions. What Europeans noticed was the mortality rates of their own family members who were sailors on the Triangular route.

## PLACES

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### LONDON

The Royal African Company held the monopoly of trade from 1672 to 1698. It administered trading posts on the west African coast, and was responsible for seizing any English ships - other than its own - involved in slaving.

### BRISTOL

After 1698 Bristol was able to use its position as an Atlantic port to become a major player in the slave trade. For 50 years in the C18th it was Britain's main slaving port. It grew in population and wealth and became England's second city. But Bristol was an expensive port to use; its harbour suffered extremes of high and low tide, and as ships became larger they had difficulties on the Avon.

Bristol... the greatest, richest and best port of the trade in Great Britain, London only excepted. The merchants of this city not only have the greatest trade, but they trade with a more entire independency upon London, than any other town in Britain.

...the Bristol merchants as they have a great trade abroad, so they have always buyers at home, for their returns and that such buyers that no cargo is too big for them.

*Tour Through England and Wales*  
Daniel Defoe: c.1720

### LIVERPOOL

Meanwhile Liverpool's port charges were much lower than Bristol's; with its long deep waterfront it was a much more efficient port and could accommodate larger ships. The demand for slaves carried in Liverpool ships rose. By the end of the C18th, Liverpool had over 60% of the British trade and 40% of the European trade. Its net proceeds from the African trade in 1783-93 were over £12M, from 878 voyages and the sale of 300,000 slaves.

### SMALLER PORTS

Ports on the south-west, south-east and north-west coasts of England, along with Glasgow, were also involved.

### THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Slavery contributed vastly to Britain's rise as an industrial nation. Slavers needed ships; crews needed provisions; traders needed goods to barter for slaves – fetters; chains, padlocks, guns, pots, kettles; plantations needed machinery; rum factories needed bottles. Cotton picked by slave labour in New England was manufactured in Lancashire and sold on the colonial market, mostly Africa.

### FINANCIAL SERVICES

Investors loaned money to slavers, bankers banked their profits, insurers insured their ships and cargoes. They and wealthy merchants built mansions and country houses; so the effect of the slave trade spread across Britain.

## **ABOLITION MOVEMENT AND ABOLITIONISTS**

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In C18th the British benefited from slavery more than any other nation: it was also the British who led the struggle to abolish the system. Christians had been complicit in the slave trade, and churches had benefited from it; yet it was Christians who were in the forefront of the abolition movement.

The first petition of Parliament against the slave trade came from the Quakers in 1783. The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed in 1787, and that started a new era of the mobilisation of public opinion through education, campaigning, mass petitions and boycotts.

### **THOMAS CLARKSON (1760 – 1846)**

After winning the Latin prize on Slavery at Cambridge, Clarkson met Granville Sharp and some Quakers, and together they formed the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Clarkson was their researcher; he interviewed 20,000 sailors and collected specimens of the ugly slave-trade ironware. He drew the infamous diagram of the slave ship *Brooks*.

### **OLAUDAH EQUIANO (c1745 – c1797)**

A survivor of the Middle Passage, Equiano managed to buy and retain his freedom in spite of being cheated many times. He made a living as a hairdresser in London and educated himself, and became an associate of Granville Sharp. In 1789 he published his autobiography, and then sold the book throughout Britain, undertaking lecture tours and actively campaigning to abolish the slave trade.

### **HANNAH MORE (1745 – 1833)**

Bristol-born writer and Christian moralist Hannah More joined the abolitionist movement in 1776. A close friend of John Newton and supporter of Wilberforce, she inspired a generation of women to take action against slavery and in other protest movements and pressure groups.

### **JOHN NEWTON (1725 – 1807)**

A former captain of a slave ship, Newton was ordained and later became active in the anti-slavery movement. Among hymns he wrote were *Amazing Grace* and *How sweet the name of Jesus sounds*.

### **GRANVILLE SHARP (1735 – 1813)**

In 1765 Granville Sharp befriended a runaway slave named Jonathon Strong and consequently was closely involved in securing the famous legal ruling of 1772, abolishing slavery within England (the Somerset case, relating to the slave James Somerset). He became first chairman of the 'Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade', was a tireless abolitionist and also part of the founding group of Sierra Leone.

## **ABOLITION MOVEMENT AND ABOLITIONISTS**

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### **OTTOBAH CUGOANO (1757 – 1801)**

Ottobah Cugoano was a slave brought by a merchant to England where he was set free. He played an important role in the case of Henry Demane, a black man due to be shipped to the West Indies as a slave. He worked with Granville Sharp, and in 1787 published an account of his experiences.

### **WILLIAM WILBERFORCE (1759 – 1833)**

William Wilberforce was the Member of Parliament for his native Hull. An Evangelical Christian, Anglican and member of the Clapham Sect, from 1787 he pursued his God-given vocation - 'the abolition of the slave trade and the reformation of manners'. Thanks to meeting Clarkson, and with the support of his university friend William Pitt, Wilberforce agitated against the slave trade and took every opportunity in the House of Commons of exposing its evils. He finally saw the Bill through the Commons, and Prime Minister Lord Grenville through the House of Lords, in 1807.

### **TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE (died in prison, 1803)**

Toussaint became leader of the slave rebellion in Saint Dominique in 1791. A brilliant military leader, he led his slave army in defeating the French as well as the invading Spanish and British. He became de facto governor of the colony. When Napoleon attempted to restore slavery in the French colonies, St Domingue returned to war. In 1803, having been promised safe conduct, Toussaint was tricked by the Napoleon's forces and imprisoned in France.

### **SAM SHARPE (hanged, 1832)**

Sam Sharp, a Baptist lay preacher in Jamaica, led the slaves to strike against any further work unless the plantation owners agreed to pay them wages. When their demands were refused, rebellion ensued, starting on 27 December, 1831 (the 'Christmas Rebellion'). Though quickly suppressed, pockets of resistance continued till May 1832, when Sharp was captured.

### **WILLIAM KNIBB (1803 – 45)**

Baptist missionary to Jamaica William Knibb was accused of raising the slaves' expectations, and therefore the rebellion of 1831. Returning to Britain in 1833, he appeared before parliamentary committees and went on an anti-slavery tour of British Baptists. Back in Jamaica in 1834, Knibb continued to further the slaves in the development of townships free of exploitation.

Other abolitionists included **HENRY THORNTON**, **THOMAS BABINGTON**, **ZACHARY MACAULAY** and **JAMES STEPHEN** and others members of the **CLAPHAM SECT**, a group of Christian friends committed to applying their faith to the social and moral conditions of their day.

# **LEGACIES OF TRANSATLANTIC SLAVERY**

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## **In West Africa, centuries of the slave trade meant**

- raids
- war
- the fomentation of factionalism
- the supply of arms
- trickery in various ways

## **resulting in**

- the destabilisation of West African coastline and inland states
- depopulation
- loss of skilled personnel
- destroyed markets and industries
- cultural genocide
- destructive effects on the African psyche

## **Meanwhile in Europe**

- the textile industries of cotton and wool grew
- jobs were created in shipbuilding and its attendant industries
- ships needed crews
- sugar refining required both capital and labour
- burgeoning economies needed banking and insurance

## **... and in the Caribbean and Americas**

- raw labour was a major resource
- after emancipation employment became an acute problem
- the infra-structure was not developed
- most people cultivated the land on small plots for a living and provided a cheap hired labour source for the sugar industry and agriculture

## **After the Second World War**

- European colonial powers like Britain had a labour shortage
- they turned to their colonies in the Caribbean to address the shortfall.
- immigrants to Britain suffered poor housing, racism and physical abuse.
- a growing British-born generation of Black people began to suffer from deprived inner-city blight and racism
- they were more likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts and suffered more at the hands of the police and the criminal justice system
- increasing racial tensions led eventually to riots in Brixton, Liverpool, Bristol and other urban areas where there was a large Black population at various times between the 1960s through to the 1990s

























