

Thomas Clarkson

And

The Abolition of Slavery

Background Information

Section 1 from the Teacher's Resource Pack for KS1-4

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For

Wisbech & Fenland Museum

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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The first ten key questions are concerned with historical issues. The eleventh is concerned with the modern day issue of the ideology of racism and its origins.

I have attempted to use the word 'slave' only when referring to the enslaved African people after they had crossed the Atlantic and been physically sold into the state of chattel slavery. A chattel slave is a person owned and treated as a piece of property. He or she can be bought or sold and forced to work in any situation without payment and with no legal rights. Chattel slaves can be abused by their owners and any children born to them would also become slaves.

Key Question 1

Why did a need develop for the transatlantic slave trade?

1.1 What impact did European settlement have on the West Indies?

Christopher Columbus, on first landing on Watling Island, wrote in his journal

“when we first stepped ashore we saw fine green trees, streams everywhere and different kinds of fruit. I called to the...captains...asking them to witness that... I was taking possession of this island for their...King and Queen...soon many of the Islanders gathered round us. I could see that they were people who would be more easily converted to our Holy Faith by love than by coercion, and wishing them to look on us with friendship I gave some of them red bonnets and glass beads which they hung round their necks and many other things of small value, at which they were so delighted and so eager to please us that we could not believe it. Later they swam out to their boats to bring us....many...things, exchanging them for such objects as glass beads and hawk bells. They took anything and gave willingly whatever they had” Columbus’ Journal 12 October 1492

Though the original conquistadors did not find riches, such as gold or other precious metals, on the West Indian islands, as they later did in South and Central America, some of the explorers stayed to build **towns** as supply bases for expeditions to North and South America and to exploit the potential of the islands for **growing crops** for Europe. The Europeans developed a liking for the new crops of tobacco, cocoa and sugar that could be easily grown in the hot dry climate.

1.2 Why did Africans become the labour force?

The Spanish settlers initially used the **native inhabitants** of the islands - the Arawaks and the Caribs - as the labour force. It has often been alleged that the harsh treatment led to the massive decline in the native population to the point where they had to look elsewhere for workers. A more plausible explanation, based on historical evidence, is that the people were struck down by a **smallpox** epidemic that arrived in Santo Domingo in 1514 and spread throughout the Greater Antilles, before moving to the Yucatan and Mexico. Oviedo, inspector of mines in San Domingo at the time of the epidemic, was later to record that the disease had killed up to two million Indians as it spread across the region. The Amerindian peoples, who had been biologically isolated from the rest of the world, had no immunity to the white man’s fevers, smallpox, chicken pox and measles etc.

As the native population diminished, the settlers tried to find an alternative workforce. An experiment in using **indentured European workers** proved unsatisfactory as they expected to be free of their contracts within five or ten years and receive a plot of land of their own. As the demand for the new crops grew, so did the need for large plantations and a large workforce. Some sources say that Bartoleme de Las Casas, a priest in Hispaniola, first suggested using **African slaves**. He was concerned about the plight of the natives and suggested to the Spanish authorities that Negro slaves would be more suited to the hard work and less prone to the illnesses that affected the Amerindians. It is alleged that just before he died in 1566 he expressed his regret over the decision, but the damage was done. It is also alleged that the first shipment of enslaved Africans reached the West Indies within less than 10 years of Columbus’ arrival. The first recorded **English** shipment was in 1562 when Sir John Hawkins went to the coast of Guinea and “*got,... partly by sword and partly by other means*”, at least 300 Africans who were sold to the Spaniards in the West Indies.

1.3 Why did it become known as the triangular trade?

Ships from Europe wishing to purchase slaves from West Africa would take goods to trade with the Africans. On reaching the West Indies the slaves would be traded for more goods, which would be sold on the return to Europe, or for bills of exchange (credit notes) to be used against purchases on future voyages. In this way the maximum profit was achieved because if goods were immediately available ships returned fully laden, and if not they did not waste time waiting for cargo.

A typical example of a ship involved in the Triangular trade might be

June or July - Leave Liverpool laden with goods, such as guns, gunpowder, alcohol, fabrics and beads for West Africa

August or September - Land on the coast when the yams, the food needed for the slaves, had just been harvested and were plentiful. Trade the goods, in the Bight Of Biafra for yams and slaves for transportation to Jamaica.

Late December to February - reach the Caribbean during sugar harvest when slave demand, and therefore prices, were highest. Sell the slaves for goods such as sugar, rum, cotton or tobacco for sale on returning back to Liverpool.

This was the general pattern, but research has shown that there were often exceptions with voyages only covering part of the route e.g. some ships travelled back from the West Indies to Africa for a second voyage, perhaps buying West Indian rum for sale in West Africa, before returning home.

About the West Indies

When Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic in 1492 he was looking for a way to reach the Spice Islands and India by sailing westward. This first voyage took him to what is believed to be Watling's Island (later called San Salvador) in the Bahamas, followed by Cuba and Hispaniola (now Haiti). On his second voyage he sighted Dominica and on the third in 1498 he reached the South American mainland. The islands in the region which included Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago became known as the 'West Indies' after Columbus' westward quest to find India. Columbus' discovery of the 'New World' opened the way for colonisation by the 'conquistadors' who hoped to find gold and other precious metals. The Caribbean Sea is named after the Carib peoples who, with the Arawaks, originally inhabited the area.

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11 Chart of the World 1773

8 Letter from Egboyoung Offeong 1783

Key Question 2

How was slavery organised in the British West Indies?

2.1 Were all the enslaved Africans taken to the West Indies?

Though much of the British trade was to the West Indies, taking all the figures over the main slave-trading period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, analysis of the shipments show that

40% of all enslaved Africans went to Brazil	20% went to the British West Indies
17% went to the French West Indies	10% went to the Spanish Islands
7% went to North America	Only about 1.5% went to Central America

The slave trading countries regularly fought for control of the West Indian islands. In the 1790s when the abolition movement was campaigning, control was as follows:

English - Antigua, St. Kitts, Jamaica, Dominica, Monserrat, Barbados, Grenada, Tobago
Spanish - St. Dominique, Porto Rico, Trinidad, Cuba
French - Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia
Danish - Santa Cruz, St. Thomas

See section 8.1

2.2 How were the enslaved Africans sold when they reached the West Indies?

Contemporary sources show us that slaves were often sold at **auctions**, alongside goods. Transactions would either be for outright **sale** or for **letting**. Individual slaves could also be sold **privately**, through **advertisements**, perhaps in the newspaper (**See Resource 14**).

In an account to support the abolition campaign, Alexander Falconbridge, a slave ship surgeon, related his own observations of the arrival of a slave ship in the West Indies and the subsequent sale of the cargo of 250 slaves, at a price that had been agreed before the sale -

"on a day appointed, the negroes were landed, and placed altogether in a large yard, belonging to the merchants to whom the ship was consigned. As soon as the hour agreed on arrived, the doors of the yard were suddenly thrown open, and in rushed a considerable number of purchasers, with all the ferocity of brutes. Some instantly seized such of the negroes as they could conveniently lay hold of with their hands. Others, being prepared with several handkerchiefs tied together, encircled with these as many as they were able. While others, by means of a rope, effected the same purpose. Falconbridge (1788) p34

Olaudah Equiano, an African slave who later wrote an account of his life described how he was sold in the manner described by Falconbridge. He called the sale a 'scramble.'

"on a signal given, (as the beat of a drum), the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best...in this manner...are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again" Equiano (1789) p61

2.3 What was life like for slaves on the plantations?

The Revd. James Ramsey, who had lived for 19 years on the West Indian island of St. Kitts, wrote an essay on slavery in 1784. In it he gave details of a day on a plantation

“..at four o’clock in the morning the plantation bell rings to call the slaves into the field....About nine o’clock they have half an hour for breakfast, which they take into the field. Again they fall to work...until eleven o’clock or noon; the bell rings and the slaves are dispersed in the neighbourhood to pick up natural grass and weeds for the horses and cattle (and to prepare and eat their own lunch)...At one, or in some plantations, at two o’clock the bell summons them to deliver in..their grass and assemble to their fieldwork..(will receive stripes if not enough grass in the bundle) About half an hour before sunset they are again required to collect grass - about seven o’clock in the evening or later according to season - deliver grass as before then dismissed to return to their huts, picking up brushwood or dry cow dung to prepare supper and tomorrow’s breakfast. They go to sleep at about midnight.” Ramsey (1784) p69

W J Gardiner, in his History of Jamaica, written some years after abolition in 1873, also gave a description of the daily routine

“ At daybreak, or even before, the slaves were called to work by the ringing of a bell or the blowing of a horn or a conch shell....after three or four hours’ labour, half an hour was allowed for breakfast, always a substantial meal, chiefly of vegetables from the grounds of the slaves. Soon after noon two hours more were allowed for dinner. Some would then take a meal; others preferred to wait till evening, when they would enjoy a plentiful, and in many cases an enormous repast. The midday recess was by such persons spent either in sleep, or by the more diligent in attending to their pigs, poultry or provision grounds. The work of the field when resumed continued till nightfall, and on estates not well managed was often protracted on moonlight nights for some time longer.”

Gardiner also included details of the division of labour on the plantations

“In the field the slaves were divided into three gangs. The first consisted of the stronger men and women: their duty was to clear the land, dig and plant the cane holes, and in crop time, cut the canes and attend to the mill house. The second gang was chiefly composed of the bigger boys and girls, pregnant women and others who from age or infirmity were unequal to heavy work: they had to weed the canes and attend to duties not requiring great strength. A third gang, composed of young children, weeded the gardens, collected fodder or food for pigs, and performed other trivial duties. The first two gangs were under the care of male drivers always armed with a whip. The third gang was entrusted to an old woman, whose long switch was no mere emblem of authority.”
Gardiner (1873) p176

Ramsey’s essay gave general details about plantation life such as

- All slaves on sugar plantations were required to collect **grass** to put in the pen (an enclosure of 60 to 70 feet in which 30-50 cattle or mules are kept and fed).
- A number of slaves were **trained** as carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, coopers etc.
- Each plantation had a **hospital**, called a hothouse, in which some slaves also worked and a surgeon was employed.

Gardiner described the slaves living accommodation

“The houses or huts...were usually found...close to the works. The... construction was simple: a few posts were put in the ground, three or four feet apart; the intervening space was wattled, and then plastered with clay; the floor of bare earth was beaten..., and the roof thatched with grass or palm fronds....A platform of boards, on which a rush mat was laid, served for a bed...the furniture consisted of...a table, a stool or two.” Gardiner (1873) p180

The cooking was done outside beneath a shelter, in earthen or iron pots. All slaves had a **weekly allowance** of 1-3lbs of grain and 3-8 herrings per week and a **yearly allowance** of 2-3yds coarse cloth.

The men were also given woollen caps and the women handkerchiefs.

Slaves did have some **free time**. On Saturday, time was allowed for them to till their plots of land. Sunday was a day of rest when slaves would have been encouraged to attend Christian services. They were also given 2 days off at Easter, and 3 days for Christmas.

Equiano related how, when he went to Kingston, Jamaica, he was

“surprised to see the number of Africans, who were assembled together on Sundays; particularly at a large commodious place called Spring Path. Here each different nation of Africa meet and dance, after the manner of their own country.” Equiano (1789) p172.

John Bernard an Englishman who lived in America from 1797 - 1811 also described how important dancing was to the slaves on the Southern plantations.

“they would walk 5 or 6 miles after a hard day’s work to enjoy the pleasure of flinging about their hands, heads and legs to the music of the banjo”

2.4 Can we prove that slaves were treated badly?

If we define bad treatment as loss of freedom and rights then of course all the enslaved Africans were treated appallingly (**see introductory notes**). However if we ignore this aspect and refer instead to the physical treatment of the slaves, it is not possible to prove whether all slaves were treated badly. However, the Revd John Newton, in his essay written to help the cause of abolition, gives some indication of the general feeling in 1751

“On talking to a...planter in Antigua in 1751 the man said that calculations had been made...to determine which was the preferable...method of managing slaves - “moderate work, plenty provisions and such treatment as might enable them to protract their lives to old age” or “rigorously draining their strength to the utmost, with little relaxation...to wear them out before they became...unable to do service; and then to buy new ones, to fill up their places?” He said these calculations determined in favour of the latter...in the island of Antigua it was seldom known that a slave lived above nine years.” Newton (1788) p38

Equiano felt that part of the problem was that many estate owners left the management of the slaves to ‘human butchers’ who treated the slaves badly. However he did describe some benevolent slave owners

“...I knew one in Monserrat whose slaves looked remarkably well, and never needed any fresh supplies of negroes; and there are many other estates, especially in Barbadoes, which from such judicious treatment, need no fresh stock of negroes at any time.” Equiano (1789) p106

But he did point out that

“Even in Barbadoes, notwithstanding those humane exceptions...mentioned...where slaves meet with the best treatment... yet the island requires 1000 negroes annually to keep up the original stock, which is only 80,000. So.. a negro’s life may be said to be there but sixteen years.” Equiano (1789) p106

Gardiner informs us that

“The free use of the whip was perfectly legal. The slave code was cruel in the extreme; it gave the master almost unlimited power, and sanctioned some of the most horrid enormities ever tolerated by law...Passing by tortures which must be nameless, legs were cut off, or one or both ears; noses were split or otherwise mutilated; branding on the cheeks was common, and cases are on record where two or more of these punishments were inflicted on the same person for the same offence. Flogging was often added.” Gardiner (1873) p178

Equiano was more explicit-

“It was very common in several of the islands...for the slaves to be branded with the initial letters of their

master's name, and a load of heavy iron hooks hung about their necks. Indeed, on the most trifling occasions they were loaded with chains, and often other instruments of torture were added. The iron muzzle, thumb-screws, &c were...sometimes applied for the slightest faults. I have seen a negro beaten till some of his bones were broken, for only letting a pot boil over." Equiano (1789) p107.

Branding was carried out at various stages in the slave trade, each time to indicate a new owner, perhaps by using the initials of the company name or a company mark. A slave could be branded at the time of capture, at the slave castle, and at the time of sale in the West Indies. **See 3.1**

The petitioners for abolition were understandably interested in proving that slaves were badly treated. They looked to the newspapers from the colonies for evidence. Thomas Clarkson found that Acts were being passed to improve the conditions of slaves, in order to stop the danger of rebellion. **See also 7.4.** The authorities were also concerned about the number of cases of the old and infirm slaves being driven from the plantations to

'beg, steal or starve' and who were 'daily infesting the publick streets of the several towns' (of Barbados).

The fact that so many slaves tried to run away could also be taken as evidence of widespread maltreatment. In one of the Jamaica papers, called the *Gazette of St. Jago de la Vega* dated October 11 1787, Thomas Clarkson found advertisements for 97 **runaway slaves**, 45 of whom were **branded**. In the supplement to the *Cornwall Chronicle* of Nov. 7th 1789 he found 135 runaways advertised, 48 with brands and one man distinguished by having both **ears cropt**.

About Jamaica

Jamaica is just 235 km long and 56 km wide. The island, named by the native Arawaks as Xaymaca, was originally claimed by Spain on Columbus's arrival at Discovery Bay in 1494 but was captured by the British in 1655, recognised under the Treaty of Madrid 1670. The Royal Africa Company was formed in 1672 with a monopoly of the Slave Trade. At this time the main products grown were sugar, indigo and cocoa. By 1772 there were 700 estates in Jamaica producing 75,000 hogsheads of sugar. Production of cocoa had ceased and that of cotton had been reduced due to the variable climate. Guinea Grass had been introduced in 1745 as cattle fodder. Ramsey in 1784 stated the population of Jamaica and its dependencies as 30,000 free inhabitants and 174,000 slaves producing 100,000 casks of sugar which could be sold in Britain at £24-30 per cask, with slaves valued at £50 each. Over 90% of modern day Jamaicans are of West African descent. Consequently the local dialect, Jamaica Talk, still contains many Ashanti words.

Can be used with resources from Thomas Clarkson & The Abolition of Slavery

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11 Chart of the World 1773

8 Letter from Egboyoung Offeong 1783 11 Chart of the World 1773

13 Plantation Inventory 1784

14 'Essequebo & Demerary Gazette' 1811

Key Question 3

How “free” were the people of West Africa before the growth of the transatlantic slave trade?

About West Africa

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, parts of West Africa, particularly the Songhay Empire, were as advanced as Europe. European travellers to the principal Songhay city of Timbuktu, remarked on its judges, professors and devout men, its university and the thriving trade in hand written books. Agriculture was based on the locality, and there was no shortage of land. Nomadic tribes moved around in the desert regions. Permanent cultivation of crops such as millet and rice was carried out in the Savanna region and by using irrigation and flood plain techniques. The cultivation of oil palm and kola trees was also carried out. The Portuguese introduced South American crops in the sixteenth century -maize, cassava, groundnuts, tobacco and cocoa. Ploughing was not used as the soil was soft and there were few animals available for pulling. Animals, when introduced, caught tropical diseases carried by insects including the tsetse fly.

Industrial innovations had taken place quite early in the region - iron smelting had been carried out since the 2nd century AD. Copper working had reached the high level shown by the Benin Bronzes and gold mining was a function of the economy. In Medieval times Europeans purchased gold from the region for currency. Studies of the Benin show that they were also highly skilled in ivory carving, pottery (from clay), beeswax, rope and gum production. There was a plentiful supply of wood for building houses and canoes.

3.1 Was there slavery in West Africa before the transatlantic trade?

Slavery was an institution in African society, but it was fundamentally different from the slavery created as a result of the transatlantic trade (**see introductory notes**). Slaves were of the same race as their masters and could be found at **every level** on the social scale. The lowest category was the labour force involved in industries such as the **salt and gold mines** where conditions were harsh. At the other end of the social scale, slaves could be found in **political administration and military positions** (with loyalty guaranteed, a slave could even be in charge of the army). Slaves were purchased to increase a kinship group, even marrying into the owners' family or working as servants. There were quite large slave plantations on the Niger river growing food for the armies of the Songhay Empire. The Benin had a great many slaves but their involvement in the trade virtually ceased, for more than a century, after it was condemned by the Oba in 1550.

For centuries before the European transatlantic trade, there had been trade, particularly with the Arabs, across the Sahara Desert. As well as **gold** and **slaves** going **North** there were **cloth, leather, ivory, and kola nuts**. Coming **South** were **glass, glass beads, copper, high quality textiles and cowrie shells**. Goods needed to be easily portable and to make a high profit, particularly as the journey took 70-90 days. Slaves would carry the goods and be sold at the end of the journey. When the Portuguese and other Europeans first wanted to obtain goods from West Africa they used the Trans-Saharan link but later they travelled around the coast and set up trading posts there.

3.2 How and why did Africans become enslaved ?

Clarkson wrote the testimony of Isaac Parker, who had run away from his post as a sailor on a slave ship and had spent time in West Africa with the slave traders. Parker had travelled on two expeditions up the river Calibar in the canoes of the natives, and described how they stopped a short distance from the village.

"they then concealed themselves under the bushes. In this position they remained during daylight. But at night they went up to it armed; and seized all the inhabitants, who had not time to make their escape. They obtained forty-five persons in this manner...in the second (expedition)...made a similar attempt, and with nearly similar success...they seized men, women, and children, as they could find them in their huts. They then bound their arms, and drove them before them to the canoes." Clarkson History (1808) p177

Equiano wrote of his capture

"One day when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both; and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, tied our hands, and ran off with us into the nearest wood: and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on..." Equiano (1789) p47

William Wilberforce in his speech to the Privy Council defined the African slaves as consisting of

1. **Prisoners** of war
2. People who had got into **debt** or **committed crimes, adultery** or **witchcraft** (often the whole family was sold as well)
3. Domestic slaves (**servants**) sold by their masters
4. People **captured** or tricked by their **chiefs, leaders or other individuals**
5. People **captured** by **Europeans** engaged in the traffic

This evidence has been supported in research by historians such as Basil Davidson, which has shown that virtually all the coastal states of West Africa supported the trade at its height. The trade was a welcome source of personal income and national revenue and a good way of getting rid of **prisoners and criminals**. Some people sold themselves directly into slavery to escape their debts and similarly some slave owners sold their **domestic slaves** when they came on hard times. The Benin, who had revived the slave trade in the seventeenth century, were selling to Dutch, French and English traders through a royal monopoly administered by the Kings Vizier. However it was the only large West African coastal state, which did not have an income predominantly dependent on the trade. Other tribes such as the Futa Toru, Bondu and Gajaaja did not sell their own people but sold **prisoners of war**. Evidence of the dependency of the trade upon wars is shown in the remarks of an agent for the Royal African Company in 1712 who explained that a battle was due soon after which he hoped the trade would flourish. John Newton also expressed his belief that the wars and the slave trade were so closely linked that if the wars ceased then so would the slave trade.

Some historians have suggested that very strong states such as the Oyo and Dahomey developed as a result of the slave trade. Both states used slaves for labour, particularly on food producing plantations, with the former also using slaves in administrative and military positions. The Oyo which controlled the grasslands inside the Savannah corridor had a strong cavalry which **captured** slaves to be traded for cowrie shells and textiles which were then traded for more horses. The Dahomey traded slaves for guns to increase their power. This tribe rose to power in the 1720s securing control of the Benin Gap - scrubland between the forests of south Ghana and south Nigeria - they established the port of Whydah to profit directly from the trade, levying a tax of cowrie shells on all slave transactions. This led to incidents where enslaved Africans were sold directly to Europeans by members of the court, thereby avoiding the tax. Similarly the Royal African Company levied a 10% charge on transactions through their forts, leading to some **European traders** organising their own raids.

The West African people sometimes fought back against the enslavement of their people. In 1703, two of the Royal African Company forts, at Sekondi and Anamabo, were attacked by Africans. In the former the chief agent was beheaded and in the latter, held for a large ransom. In 1742, a slave ship on the River Gambia was driven ashore and plundered by local people, whilst the crew were murdered or captured by the slaves on board. The slaves eventually escaped. In 1794 the ruler of the most active state on the Upper Guinea coast, Futa Jallon, informed two British envoys from Sierra Leone, James Watt and Matthew Winterbottom

"that if he could get guns and powder, and everything else he wanted for Ivory, Rice and Cattle, he would soon drive all the Slave dealers out of the Country."

3.3 What happened to the Africans after they had been captured?

After being captured inland the enslaved Africans needed to be marched to the coast to meet the transatlantic ships. This journey could be long (for Equiano it was six or seven months) with the captives often chained together. Clarkson described this march

"during their march they were tied together with leather thongs, which permitted them to walk at the distance of about a yard from one another, many of them were loaded with elephants tusks which had been purchased at the same time, many of them perished some by hunger, but the greater number by fatigue." Clarkson Essay (1786) p84

When the enslaved reached the coast they were kept in forts known as '**slave castles**' until the ships arrived. Alternatively, they might be kept on board the slave ships for weeks or months waiting until the ship was fully laden and ready for the Atlantic crossing. Equiano was taken straight on to the ship. In either case, conditions were harsh and mortality rates high. In 1790 the captain of a ship from Bristol reported the deaths of 203 of a shipment of 903 Africans that had been purchased while still on the African coast.

The first European 'slave castle' in West Africa had been built at Elmina in 1481 by the Portuguese as a base to keep the coastal region free from other foreigners and as storage for trade goods to enable a speedier turnaround for the ships. As the slave trade evolved, all the European trading countries had established such castles. Sometimes, as in the case of the Dahomey controlled port of Whydah, different nations had adjacent forts, each paying rent to the Dahomey king. Cape Coast Castle, controlled by the British 'Royal African Company' had luxurious living quarters for the government officials, and a spacious central hall for welcoming guests and chief African traders. The premises also had counting houses, shops and land nearby where the residents grew their own crops. The enslaved were kept under radically different conditions. Up to 1000 Africans could be imprisoned at Cape Coast in dark and musty vaulted dungeons that had been hewn out of the rock.

Though there were exceptions in the case of small traders, the main trading pattern was determined by the country of origin, and the position of their slave castles. Most of the British ships embarked slaves south of the Benin River in the Bight of Biafra and West-Central Africa (often referred to as Angola). Favoured trading ports were Whydah, Lagos, New Calabar, Bonny, Calabar, Cameroons and Gaboon. The French were more likely to trade from the Bight of Benin (Whydah) and the West Coast - Senegal and Gambia, and the Portuguese from West Central Africa (Cabinda, Benguela & Luanda).

About the Efik traders of Old Calabar

Antera Duke, one of the traders, wrote a diary which included a number of entries concerning the trader Egbo Young, (see resource no 8) and his house 'Liverpool Hall', which appears to be a two storey wooden house as might befit a person of chief status. The Efik

enslaved thieves and adulterers of their own people, purchased slaves from neighbouring towns with which they had established trade relations, and also went on war expeditions to capture slaves from other villages. The diary for the years 1785-8 gives account of 7511 slaves exported from Calabar. Entry for 14.2.1785 describes one of the local canoes coming home at 5am with yams. "I gave Captain Savage 1000 yams for 100 copper (rods) and at midnight Captain Brown's tender goes away with 430 slaves."

Old Calabar had become a minor trading centre for slaves by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Trading was done on trust with goods being handed over to the native chief who would then use them to purchase the required number of slaves. Currency had been in the form of imported copper or iron rods or copper wire. Trade goods also included these plus knives, gin, rum, tankards, basins, beads, locks, mirrors, guns, powder and shot. Isaac Parker had spent five months at Duke Town in 1765 with the trader Dick Ebro.

3.4 How did the traders pay for the enslaved Africans?

The traders used various items to pay for the purchase of enslaved Africans, depending very much on what was required by the seller. In 1716 the Factor at Whydah said the price of a slave was

136lbs of cowries
or 16 guns
1 1/2 ankers of brandy
7 rolls tobacco
36 pieces Silesian Linen
or 150lbs gunpowder

Thomas Clarkson, in his essay (pt 1 p28), outlined three categories of trade goods

1. Products from the East Indies - cowrie shells, which passed as money; blue & white bass, romals, bandanoes and other cloths
2. Home-made (colonial) products -bar iron, muskets, powder, swords, pans, cotton, linen, spirits
3. Venetian beads in different colours depending what is in fashion

He went on to explain that mediums of exchange had been devised which included Cowrie shells at Whydah and Manillas (bracelets of iron) at Bonny

On giving account of his expedition to West Africa in 1795, Mungo Park described the price of a prime slave as being 9-12 minkallies. One minkalli was worth about 10 shillings or 48 leaves of tobacco or 20 charges of gunpowder or a cutlass. Three or four minkallies could be exchanged for a musket and between ten and seventeen for a horse.

3.5 Did the African slave traders become 'westernized'?

Alexander Falconbridge described how the slave ship captains

"invite the Kings of Bonny to come on board, to whom...they usually make presents...which generally consist of pieces of cloth, cotton, chintz, silk handkerchiefs and other India goods, and sometimes brandy, wine or beer." Falconbridge (1788) p7

Thomas Clarkson also highlighted the African taste for European spirits. He calculated that 184,816 gallons of British spirits were sent to the West coast of Africa in 1786 from Liverpool alone (Clarkson essay p36).

Mungo Park on his expedition up the River Niger in 1795 took a large number of items for making presents to the kings, which included

200 yards scarlet cloth
30 yards blue cloth
20 yards green & 10 yards yellow
Scarlet Salisbury flannel, red night caps &c
£150 Amber, £50 Coral & £50 Mock Coral
£50 white and red garnets
£50 gold beads, small black, white & yellow beads
5 double barrelled guns
5 pairs of ditto pistols
5 swords with belts
Small mirrors
Knives, Scissors, Spectacles & Dollars
(Account of the Life of Mungo Park)

As well as the slave traders requiring 'Western' products as payment, there was also trading in these products for general purchase at markets. Equiano described how in his homeland they were visited at their market by

"stout, mahogany coloured men from the south west...(who) bring us firearms, gunpowder, hats, beads, & dried fish." Equiano (1789) p37

African traders learnt to speak Western languages. In 1555, John Lok, a London merchant, brought five Africans from Guinea to London to learn English. They then returned home to be interpreters for the traders. The nineteenth century historian, G Williams recorded the contents of several letters written to the Liverpool merchants in English, the earliest dated 1773. Captain Hugh Crow also noted that the Calabar Duke and traders could speak English and write business letters in the language. African leaders' sons, including Prince Niambanna of Sierra Leone, in the late 18th century, were often educated in England.

Captain Hugh Crow described how the chiefs in Calabar lived in European style two-storey houses made from timber from Liverpool. The house of one of the chiefs named Duke Ephraim contained numerous clocks, watches, sofas, pictures, porcelain cabinets and beds of European manufacture. According to Crow, these items were muddled up with African objects and badly in need of cleaning.

Falconbridge commented that the house of the King of the slave-trading city of Bonny was

"surrounded by warehouses containing European goods, designed for the purchase of slaves."
Falconbridge (1788) p8

Hugh Crow also explained the importance placed by the Africans on their being thought of good character. They often carried a 'book', which was often only a bit of paper, specifying their character and behaviour, which they would present for the captain's inspection when they were planning to trade with him. See resource 10 - The ivory disc was included in the Clarkson Chest. It is inscribed on the obverse: 'Sold the Alfred 30 slaves. West India of Grandy Bonney a good trader and an honest man' and on the reverse: 'The gift of Captain John Trousdall to young West India of Grandy Bonney'. There is a comparable disc uniface, pierced and inscribed in script 'Tom Buck of Grandy Bonny, an honest trader, he sold me 20 slaves, ship Liverpool' at the Merseyside Museum.

About Cowrie shells

A study shows that 20% -30% of the value of imports to the Bight of Benin was in cowrie shells carried in casks. The cowrie shells came all the way from the Maldives, which gave them the rarity required for a currency. Over the centuries the use of shells as currency spread throughout West Africa. They could be spent anywhere from Timbuktu to Benin and along the Niger. The only difference across the kingdoms was in the counting methods - on strings,

in bags etc. The Dutch became the main purchasers of cowrie shells from the East and they sold them to other countries wishing to trade with Africa.

As the slave trade increased, so did the number of cowrie shells in circulation. By the 1770s the cost was 160 - 176,000 cowries per slave (400-440lbs of cowries @ 400 shells to the lb). Olaudah Equiano was originally sold, in 1856, for 172 (probably lbs) of cowries. By the mid 1800s so many cowrie shells were in circulation in West Africa that their value was less than a farthing for 25 with 5-10 shells required for the purchase of just a handful of grain. As the load to be carried by one man was a 50lb bag the increased quantities ended up being carried in very cumbersome casks. An attempt was made during the Niger expedition (see 8.4) to reform the cowrie system as counting was 'a very tedious affair'. Captain Trotter thought he had persuaded the people that it was better to measure than count but it did not seem to catch on!!

Can be used with resources from Thomas Clarkson & The Abolition of Slavery

Teacher's Pack published by Wisbech & Fenland Museum

6(b) Map of the Western Coast of Africa 1791

7(a) Capture of Slaves

8 Letter from Egboyoung Offeong 1783

9(a) Cowrie Shells & 9(b) Manillas

10 Ivory Disc

Key Question 4

Were the crews on the slave ships treated as badly as the captives before abolition?

4.1 What were conditions like for enslaved Africans on the ships?

As soon as the naked enslaved Africans were put aboard the slave ship, the men were shackled two by two at the ankles. The women and children were not shackled. All the slaves were then taken below deck where they were forced to sleep on bare wooden floors. The Revd. John Newton, a former slave trader, described the method of storage below deck –

“The cargo of a vessel of a hundred tons or a little more is calculated to purchase from 220 to 250 slaves. Their lodging rooms below the deck which are three (for the men, the boys, and the women) besides a place for the sick, are sometimes more than five feet high and sometimes less; and this height is divided toward the middle for the slaves to lie in two rows, one above the other, on each side of the ship, close to each other like books upon a shelf. I have known them so close that the shelf would not easily contain one more. The poor creatures, thus cramped, are likewise in irons for the most part which makes it difficult for them to turn or move or attempt to rise or to lie down without hurting themselves or each other ...the motion of the ship...adds to the uncomfortableness.” Newton (1788) p33

Evidence for the abolition inquiry proved the accuracy of Newton’s description particularly in the case of the 320 ton Liverpool slaver *The Brookes*. In 1788 the Government sent Captain Parrey of the Royal Navy to measure the slave vessels that were then lying at Liverpool and report his findings to the inquiry. Parrey also checked the official records of the ship for the numbers of slaves carried, and interviewed the crew. He calculated that the ship would only have the capacity to carry 454 slaves. Yet Thomas Trotter MD, the ships surgeon admitted that the ship had carried 609 slaves.

From Parrey’s dimensions of *The Brookes* a detailed plan was drawn up to show how the slaves would be stowed. This plan achieved fame as the widely circulated abolition illustration known as ‘The Print’ (see Resource 12). Thomas Clarkson included this illustration in his publications with the dimensions, which included the following

<i>‘Length of the Boys’ Room, EE</i>	<i>13 feet 9 inches</i>
<i>Breadth of the Boys’ Room</i>	<i>25 feet</i>
<i>Breadth of Platforms, FF in boys’ room</i>	<i>6 feet</i>
<i>The height above the platform DFH Fig 1 and below it CEG is...but two feet seven inches.’</i>	

Evidence (1791) p37/8

Research has shown that the average ship from Benin was 192 tons carrying 387 enslaved Africans, and that of Biafra 122 tons carrying 313 slaves. However, Thomas Clarkson found that traders could use any form of vessel.

“I was greatly struck...by the appearance of two little sloops, which were fitting out for Africa, the one of only twenty-five tons, which was said to be destined to carry seventy; and the other of only eleven, which was...to carry thirty slaves. I was told that these were not to act as tenders on the coast, by going up and down the rivers. Receiving slaves. and then carrying them to a large ship ...to the West Indies, but that it was...intended, that they should transport their own slaves (and) they were on their arrival in the West Indies to be sold as pleasure vessels, and the seamen were to be permitted to come home by what is usually called the run...”. Clarkson (1808).VOL I p327

He found that the smaller vessel had been built as a pleasure boat for the accommodation of six persons

on the Severn. He later checked official records and found that both vessels did go to Africa.

Thomas Trotter, of the *Brookes*, described the daily routine on a slave ship. If the weather was fine, all the slaves were brought up on deck at 8 am. The men were attached by their leg irons, to a long chain on the deck. The women and children were allowed to wander. At 9am the slaves were served breakfast. In the case of slaves from the Bight of Biafra, this would be stewed yams. With this food they would be given half a pint of water. The slaves were then made to 'dance' for exercise and to prevent melancholy, with the men jumping in their leg irons, to the threat of whipping if they didn't move. A slave banging a drum or an instrument if one was available would provide music. While the slaves were dancing some of the crew would be sent below to scrape and swab out the sleeping rooms. In the middle of the afternoon the slaves were given their second meal, often similar to the first. They were then put below deck.

In bad weather the slaves would not be brought up on deck, but would be served their meals in the hold. It was in such conditions that the slaves suffered the most discomfort, particularly as the air vents often had to be covered. As John Newton recorded

"if the slaves and their rooms can be constantly aired, and they are not detained too long on board, perhaps. not many die; but the contrary is often their lot. They are kept down by the weather to breathe a hot and corrupted air, sometimes for a week...the galling of the irons...and the despondency...soon becomes fatal and every morning, perhaps, more instances than one are found of the living and the dead fastened together.. I believe nearly one half of the slaves on board have sometimes died...The ship on which I was Mate, left the coast with two hundred and eighteen slaves on board...we buried sixty two on our passage to South Carolina." Newton (1788) p35

Equiano recorded how when the ship was fully laden with cargo, they were all put under deck and

"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. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died. This wretched situation was...aggravated by the galling of the chains...the filth of the necessary tubs...the shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole scene of horror almost inconceivable." Equiano (1789) p58

Efforts have been made to calculate the mortality rate of the enslaved Africans during the Middle Passage. The historians Eltis & Richardson estimated that over the three hundred and fifty years of the transatlantic trade over 1.5 million of the Africans died on the Middle Passage. This figure equates to about 15 per cent. They have also calculated that between 6,000 and 8,000 slaves died each year on the Atlantic crossing, during the peak years from 1760-1810.

Thomas Clarkson and other abolitionists highlighted an extreme case when, in 1783, one hundred and thirty slaves were thrown alive into the sea from on board the English slave ship *The Zong*. There was sickness on board the ship and the captain made the decision to throw the slaves overboard, rather than allow them to infect others and use the supplies of food and water. He hoped to claim for the loss on the insurance. The abolitionist Granville Sharp was unsuccessful in his attempt to have the Zong captain prosecuted for murder. (see section on Sharp).

4.2 How did the enslaved Africans react to being on board the slave ships?

Many Africans reacted against being on board the ships by acts of individual defiance. Olaudah Equiano described his own experience

"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; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them

held me fast by the hands, and laid me across, I think, the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely.” Equiano (1789) p56.

Equiano was not alone in his suicide attempt. Alexander Falconbridge, in his testimony to the abolition inquiry explained that

“He has known several slaves on board refuse sustenance,...to starve themselves. Compulsion was used.. to make them take their food. He has also known many instances of their refusing to take medicines when sick, because they wished to die.” Evidence (1791) p39

Equiano related how he had continued wishing to end his own life

“could I have got over the nettings, I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water; and I have seen some poor African prisoners most severely cut for attempting to do so”.
Equiano (1789) p56

He then went on to explain later events when some prisoners

“somehow made through the nettings, and jumped into the sea.....immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example...” The crew were then alerted and they put all the slaves below deck whilst they got out a boat to go after the slaves. The two drowned but the other was rescued and flogged *“unmercifully, for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery”.* Equiano (1789) p59

Falconbridge confirmed that the ships are *“fitted with a view to prevent slaves jumping overboard (though).. he has known instances of their doing so”.* The belief of many West Africans was that they went back home to their native lands when they died, so they died happy and were more prone to commit suicide. When on the ship there was more chance of rebellion while land was in sight. Very close watch was kept on the enslaved Africans in these circumstances with the crew carrying loaded guns. Ships often set sail at night to avoid potential rebellion.

There are also accounts of large-scale collective resistance by the enslaved Africans, often in cases where they had been given the chance to spend time on board, such as when members of the crew were sick. This was the case on an English ship in 1765. As a result of this particular intended mutiny, eighty Africans were forced overboard. John Newton also gave testimony to severe punishments being given after attempted rebellions. For the period 1699 - 1845, there are also fairly detailed accounts of 55 mutinies on slave ships and mention of more than 100 others incidents of rebellion.

4.3 What were conditions like for the crews of the slave ships?

Thomas Clarkson found, during his inquiries into the slave trade, that conditions were also harsh for the crews. Even the recruitment procedures were suspect. While visiting Bristol he found many young seamen, *“unacquainted with the nature of the slave trade”*, tempted on to the ships by the promise of high wages. He also observed a reluctant young man plied with alcohol until intoxicated, *“when a bargain was made over him between the landlord and the mate”* and he was carried away to the waiting ship. Falconbridge also found that

“there are certain public houses, in which...the sailors are...encouraged to run into debt.. the landlord ..insists upon their entering on board...a ship, threatening, in case of refusal, to arrest and throw them into prison. At the same time the captain holds out the allurements of a month’s pay in advance above the ships in any other trade...and the promise of satisfying their landlords.” Falconbridge (1788) p49

Clarkson also found evidence of men who had been forced to sign articles agreeing to arrangements whereby, if they were to be discharged or die on ship, their wages would be paid in West Indian currency which was of less value than English currency. Clarkson was moved to record that *“The trade was, in short, one mass of iniquity from the beginning to the end.”*

Clarkson determined to look further into the situation of the crew of the slave ships on the triangular trade voyages, which could last as long as 12 months. He wondered if their treatment could influence their behaviour towards the slaves.

Falconbridge testified that on one voyage, out of a crew of 46, only 15 returned home-

- In West Africa - 11 had deserted, 5 had died and 1 had been discharged
- On the Middle Passage - 2 had died
- In West Indies - 5 deserted, 1 died and 5 were discharged
- On the home journey - 1 died

The House of Commons Committee looked at the Muster Rolls of Liverpool and Bristol to assess the situation. The findings are tabulated below

Abstract of such of the Muster-rolls of Liverpool and Bristol slaveships as were returned into the customs-houses there, from Sept. 1784 - Jan. 5th 1790

Periods	no. of vessels	original crews	died of original crews	brought home of original crews
1784-1785	74	2915	615	1279
1785-1786	62	2163	436	944
1786-1787	66	2136	433	1073
1787-1788	68	2422	623	1114
1788-Jan 1790	80	2627	536	1350
TOTALS	350	12263	2643	5760

Evidence of the Petitioners for the abolition of the slave trade (1791)

From these figures they could see that over 20% of the original crews perished and nearly 50% of those that went out, did not return with the crew.. When researching further, Clarkson analysed the statistics of 5000 individual sailors. He found that 2320 came home, 1130 died, 80 were discharged in Africa or unaccounted for, and 1470 deserted or were discharged in the West Indies. (Impolicy p50-53)

The historian Stephen D Behrendt , has recently looked more closely at the muster records for the period 1780-1807 to analyse crew mortality. He found that of 58,775 crew from Liverpool, 10,439 died during the voyages, a rate of 17.8%. From a similar sample of 12,234 deaths amongst 66,325 crew on Liverpool voyages, 10,639 died, 1314 were drowned and 281 killed. Behrendt’s research showed that unhealthy conditions led to increased mortality. The crews were given tasks that made them more vulnerable to illness, including having to clean the holds and go ashore in West Africa to get provisions.

A rhyme was used by sailors to describe this area

“Beware and take care of the Bight of Benin, there’s few that come out yet many go in.”

Crew mortality was higher on the ships arriving on the West African coast in June and July during the rainy season. This may have been more beneficial for the trade itself but undoubtedly added to the likelihood of sailors becoming sick. Behrendt found that a very high proportion of deaths (80%) were

from fever - mainly yellow fever and malaria - and a small proportion (10%) from fluxes - mainly dysentery.

John Newton had addressed this issue

"the people who remain on ship-board, upon the open coast, if not accustomed to the climate, are liable to the attack of a... fever... Many vessels arrive upon the coast before the rainy season which continues from about May to October, is over... Tornadoes or violent storms of wind, thunder and heavy rain, are very frequent." Newton (1788) p9

As for the cases of those that were killed, Thomas Clarkson had found 61 individual cases of cruelty, including a young surgeon's mate who was beaten to death. Clarkson found a young man called Dixon who could give evidence of cruelty

"he had been cruelly used so early as in the outward bound passage, which had occasioned him to jump overboard. When taken up he was put in irons, and kept in these for a considerable time. He was afterwards ill used at different times." Clarkson (1808) p312

We can find evidence of incidences of maltreatment in the contemporary accounts. Equiano described an incident

"One white man in particular I saw, when we were permitted to be on the deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope,.... that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute." Equiano (1789) p57

Of the cases of the crew that did not return home, many jumped ship due to the conditions on ship, some to kill themselves, others just to escape. Falconbridge related a case where one young man who had jumped overboard in West Africa was brought back and questioned about his actions. He replied -

"he expected to be devoured by the sharks, but he preferred even that to being treated daily with so much cruelty." Falconbridge (1788) p41

Isaac Parker was employed on the Liverpool ship *Lathan* on which the Captain had been ill-treating the crew. At Old Calabar the ship was temporarily delayed at the coast. Parker persuaded a local trader Dick Ebro to shelter him for 3 days until the ship had left the port. He then stayed for five months doing odd jobs for the trader, including going on slave raids (**see 3.2**).

Sailors would also desert ship in the West Indies, to go onshore to seek higher wages. Some ships deliberately planned to let some of the crew go to save on costs on the final leg of the journey. The situation got so bad that in 1797 an Act was passed to prohibit the desertion of seamen from British merchant vessels in the West Indies. The law regulated the wages on the home run and fined captains who employed deserted sailors.

Can be used with resources from Thomas Clarkson & The Abolition of Slavery

Teacher's Pack published by Wisbech & Fenland Museum

7(b) Slave Ship 8 Letter from Egboyoung Offeong 1783

12 The *Brookes* Slave Ship

Key Question 5

How did the situation of Black people in Britain compare with that of the White Poor before the abolition of slavery?

5.1 How were Black slaves treated in Britain before abolition?

The nephew of Lord and Lady Mansfield, Sir John Lindsay, had a daughter by an African slave woman. The child, Dido Elizabeth Lindsay, was born in 1763 and later placed in the household of the Mansfield's as a companion and personal servant to their own daughter at their home - Kenwood House in London. We have descriptions of her in personal family papers and a painting of the two girls. Lord Mansfield was the Chief Justice in England and he is remembered as the judge who gave judgment in the case of James Somerset in 1772 (**see below**). When Mansfield died in 1793 he gave Elizabeth her freedom in his will.

This example illustrates the position of many Black slaves in Britain. They were often treated well as they were prized domestic servants and symbols of wealth and taste. Equiano wrote about his uncomfortable experience in a house in England

"My master lodged at the house of a gentleman in Falmouth, who had a fine little daughter about six or seven years of age, and she grew prodigiously fond of me; insomuch that we used to eat together, and had servants to wait on us. I was so much caressed by this family... I began to fear I should be betrothed to this young lady; and when my master asked me if I would stay there with her behind him, as he was going away with the ship...I cried...and said I would not leave him." Equiano (1789) p68

Equiano went back on ship with his owner and a few years later he was again in England, this time in London

"Shortly after my arrival, he sent me to wait upon the Miss Guerins,and they sent me to school I used to attend these ladies about the town, in which service I was extremely happy; as I had thus very many opportunities of seeing London, which I desired of all things." Equiano (1789) p78

Equiano worked hard and learnt to read and write before going back to sea.

Ignatius Sancho found it more difficult to get an education. He had been born in 1729 on a slave ship on the middle passage, and had been brought to England as an orphan slave, at the age of two years, to be placed with three maiden sisters in Greenwich, near London. He was later to write in a letter

"The first part of my life was rather unlucky, as I was placed in a family who judged ignorance the best and only security for obedience." Sancho (1782) p73

However, Sancho's luck was to change. He met the Duke of Montagu who was interested in the education of Black people. Montagu had, a few years earlier, brought a freeborn black person, Francis Williams from Jamaica, educated him and enabled him to study mathematics at Cambridge University. Williams had become a published poet and Montagu was anxious to prove he was not unique in his abilities. Montagu took a personal interest in encouraging the education of Sancho, though he was unable to persuade the sisters to support the young man's education. After Montagu died in 1749, Sancho managed to escape the sisters by gaining a position in the household as butler to the Duchess.

We have evidence that not all slaves were treated well. In 1765, a slave named Jonathan Strong, was wandering destitute in London after being badly beaten and abandoned by his master. He was admitted to St. Bart's hospital where he spent four months recovering. Granville Sharp met Strong when he was

first admitted into the hospital and then got him a job when he had recovered. Two years later, his owner, a Barbados slave master and lawyer named David Lisle, saw him, had him kidnapped, and sold to a plantation owner named Kerr who planned to ship him to the West Indies. Strong managed to send word to Sharp, who stopped the action. Kerr then sought to prosecute Sharp for unlawfully detaining the property of another. Sharp was unable to find a legal adviser to help him, but managed to fight the case himself. Kerr dropped the case, but sadly Jonathan died five years later of illness. He was 25 years of age.

About Granville Sharp

Granville Sharp was born at Durham in 1735, the son of an archdeacon and grandson of the Archbishop of York. He was educated at Durham Grammar School but as he was the seventh and youngest son, he was apprenticed at the age of 14. In 1758 he got a post at the Ordnance Department but resigned in 1776 through sympathy with America. He wrote widely and supported a large number of causes and was concerned with justice for all -including Amerindians, West Indians, the Irish, and the Scottish Highlanders. He also supported the French Revolution and was involved in a campaign to abolish the press gang. He defended the Negro James Somerset in the case, judged by Mansfield, which led to the widely held belief that after 1772, 'as soon as any slave sets his foot upon English territory, he becomes free'. On March 19th 1783, he recorded in his diary, "Gustavus Vasa, a Negro called on me, with an account of one hundred and thirty Negroes being thrown alive into the sea from on board an English slave ship." Sharp lost his attempt to have the captain of this ship, the Zong, prosecuted for murder. Sharp was called Chairman of the abolition committee though he never accepted the chair, preferring to sit at the lowest end of the table. He was the only committee member who spoke against the decision to push for the trade alone to be abolished (see below). He was instrumental in the formation of the Sierra Leone colony and also active in the British & Foreign Bible Society. He died, unmarried, in 1813

5.2 What was life like for free Black people?

Free black people who had wealth and status could do well, wear fine clothes and run successful businesses. Cesar Picton was brought from Senegal in 1761 to live as a retainer of Sir John Phillips in Norbiton. He later became a respected coal merchant and gentleman living in Kingston near London. He died at the age of 81 in 1836 and was buried in the Parish Church.

Ignatius Sancho (**see 5.1**) remained with the Montagu family for many years until illness and obesity led to his retiring to run a grocer's shop in Westminster. He had been left £70, and an annuity of £30 per year by the Duchess. On his death in 1780, his widow published his letters and received more than £500 from sales. His obituary was the first for an African to be printed in the British press and his friends, during his lifetime, had included duchesses, painters, actors, artists and booksellers.

Equiano was aided by abolitionist friends, such as Thomas Clarkson, who helped recommend his book "The Interesting Narrative", whilst he was on his 'publicity tour' (**see Resource No 17**), and by contacts who could help to secure his safety (**see Resources 18a & 18b**). He married a white woman from Soham in Cambridgeshire and died in 1816 leaving an estate, worth £950, to his daughter (equivalent to over £80,000 today). His wealth came mostly from the sales of his book.

However, there were a large number of black people who were poor, many of them living in the cities, especially London. The Somerset case in 1772 mentioned 14-15,000 Blacks in Britain. This figure could be an exaggeration, but we know that there was a substantial increase in the numbers in the early 1780s as a result of loyalist servants and soldiers coming to Britain after the American civil war ended. Thousands of them had travelled to Canada so they could remain under British rule. Large numbers of Black slaves had been offered their freedom if they fought for the British in the revolution. Added to this were large numbers of black seamen, abandoned by the British Navy after the peace of 1783.

By 1785 the problem in East London became noticeable with a large number of poor black people starving and cold on the streets. In 1786 Granville Sharp formed the Committee for Black Poor in London to help ease the situation. More than £1000 had been raised by local businessmen to provide food, clothes, blankets, healthcare and jobs to 460 Blacks, whose average age was 25, and of whom half came from North America - Virginia, South Carolina and Jamaica. When the charity money ran out Parliament approved relief payments of 6 pence per day.

In 1786 the idea of founding a self-governing free settlement in Sierra Leone was put forward as a solution to the problem. The Treasury agreed to grant £14 per person. In January 1787 a newspaper reported that

"The Mayor has given orders to the City Marshalls...and Constables, to take up all the blacks they find begging about the streets, and bring them before him...that they may be sent home, or to the new colony that is going to be established in Africa." Quoted in Carretta (1995) p298

Equiano was appointed as Commissary to the project. His muster lists show that the settlers were not just Blacks, but also included mixed race couples. Of 459 people, 344 were black (290 men, 43 women, 11 children) and 115 white (31 men, 75 women, 9 children). The voyage set sail on 8th April 1787.

The Philanthropist p97 Vol. 4 No. XIV 1814 later gave an account of the journey

"the black poor in London and its vicinity, who had been fed in the year 1786 by the bounty of the late Mr. Granville Sharp and others, were collected in 1787, and put on board the ship Myro to be conveyed to Sierra Leone, there to get their own living by their industry and to form an independent annuity of themselves... when they set sail from London their number exceeded 400 and they were accompanied by several white adventurers, of whom the greater part were women, chiefly of the lowest order, in ill health, and of but moderate character....adverse winds so come in to Plymouth, where 15 left the ship and no less than 50 died. 34 died during the passage."

The ship reached Sierra Leone on the 9th May at the start of the rainy season when cultivation of crops was impossible. The settlement was broken up in December, when King Jimmy attacked the town in a mistaken revenge against Americans whose slave ship had abducted some of his people. See section on John Clarkson (**Key Question 6**) for further details on the settlement.

A few words about Olaudah Equiano

*He was born around 1745 in an Ibo village - part of Benin kingdom. He was kidnapped at about the age of ten, sold into slavery and given the name Gustavus Vassa by one of his owners. He served as the slave of an officer in the British Navy in the Seven Years War, expecting freedom at the end of the war in 1762. However he was sold back into slavery but managed, through private business deals, to purchase his freedom in 1766. He spent time as a freeman on a Central American plantation, and on voyages to the West Indies, North America, the Mediterranean and the North Pole before settling in England in 1774. He was appointed as Commissary for the Sierra Leone resettlement project (**see above**) but was dismissed while the ships were still at Plymouth, after he pointed out irregularities in the supplies (see narrative p304/5). Equiano wrote many letters to newspapers on the subject of abolition and in 1789 when 'The Interesting Narrative' was published, he travelled throughout England, Ireland and Scotland to publicise the book, and to promote abolition. Subscribers to the book included The Prince of Wales, The Duke of York, Thomas and John Clarkson, Granville Sharp and Josiah Wedgwood. In 1792 Equiano married Susannah Cullen from Soham in Cambridgeshire and they had two daughters. Susannah died in December 1795, and Equiano in 1797. Granville Sharp visited him on his deathbed*

5.3 What was life like for the White poor?

A large number of people were concerned about the plight of the poor in Britain in the age when industrial towns were developing and people were being pressured into moving away from the

countryside.

In the 1790s many riots had broken out over the price of food. In 1792 the seamen at Yarmouth and Ipswich left their ships and rioted because their pay was insufficient to meet the rising cost of food. In 1794/5 many East Anglian towns and villages are recorded as raising subscriptions to pay for wheat for the poor. Also in 1795, the men working on the banks of the drains north of Wisbech threatened to level the farmers' houses "*unless they would supply them with bread and would sell them mutton at 4 pence per pound*".

In 1796 some resolutions were prepared for the consideration of the Manchester Board of Health. These can, perhaps, throw some light on the plight of the urban populations, particularly of the children.

"It appears that children and others who work in the large cotton factories, are peculiarly disposed to be affected by the contagion of fever, and that when such infection is received, it is rapidly propagated, not only amongst those who are crowded together in the same apartments, but in the families and neighbourhoods to which they belong....The large factories are generally injurious to the constitution of those employed in them, even when no particular diseases prevail, from the debilitating effects of hot and impure air...The... labour of the night, and the protracted labour of the day, with respect to children,.... tends to diminish future expectations...by impairing the strength and destroying the vital stamina.." Tames (1971) p132

In a letter dated 21st October 1800, William Hale described his experience as an overseer of the poor in Spitalfields, lamenting particularly the sheer numbers of people living in poverty, often because, due to ill-health, they were unable to work

"I am frequently called upon to witness scenes of the most awful distress; to visit families who, to satisfy the cravings of hunger, have long ago been forced to part with their clothes and linen, and, almost expiring amidst the awful horrors of starvation, have scarcely a rag to cover their nakedness. An apothecary not far from me...of the dreadful situation of the poor, told me in the course of his practice since last November he knows of above a hundred cases of children dying for want of food, and of about 40 grown up people that had also fell victims to that awful calamity; ..their weekly pittance...is not sufficient to purchase...bread for one day." Tames (1971) p169

He also described the situation in the workhouse

"The number of our paupers in the house then was 412. It is considerably more than full. We are obliged to put them three and in some cases four in a bed."

The plight of the white poor did not change over the years that the abolition movement was in existence, and as the anti-slavery movement grew, people began to compare their standard of living to that of the West Indian slaves. In 1823, William Cobbett printed a letter to William Wilberforce in his periodical

"It is notorious that great numbers of your "free British labourers" have actually died from starvation.....when the Minister (Wilberforce) declared that there was an overproduction of food.....you do all...which it is in your power to do to draw public attention away from the real sufferings of the people at home to the imaginary sufferings of the Blacks...your free British labourers are worse off than your Black slaves...you describe their (the white poor) situation as desirable, by putting it in contrast with that of the Blacks, by the use of the words free and freedom."
Cobbetts Political Register XLVII c.522

In 1830, the Rev. R W Hamilton made a speech in Leeds, which included the words

"it is the pride of Britain that a slave cannot exist on her soil; and if I read the...constitution aright, I find that Slavery is most abhorrent to it - that the air which Britons breathe is free - the ground on which they tread is sacred to liberty".

The words were included in a local paper, with additional critical comments by Richard Oastler

"The proud and able champions of Negro liberty and Colonial rights should, if I mistake not, have gone further than they did; or perhaps, to speak more correctly, before they had travelled so far as the West Indies, should, at least for a few moments have sojourned to our immediate neighbourhood, and have directed the attention of the meeting to scenes of misery, acts of oppression and victims of Slavery, even on the threshold of our homes! ... The very streets which receive the droppings of an 'Anti-Slavery Society' are every morning wet with the tears of innocent victims ... who are compelled (not by the cart-whip of the negro slave-driver) but by the dread of the equally appalling thong or strap of the overlooker, to hasten half-dressed, but not half-fed, to those magazines of British Infantile Slavery - the Worsted Mills in the town and neighbourhood of Bradford!!!..... Thousands of little children, both male and female...from SEVEN to fourteen years, are daily compelled to labour from six o'clock in the morning to seven in the evening with only- Britons, blush whilst you read it! with only thirty minutes allowed for eating and recreation..."

Tames (1971) p99

About Anthony Benezet and the Quakers

Anthony Benezet was born in Picardy in 1713 to a Protestant family. Because of their religious beliefs, his family... had to move, firstly to Holland, then London, before finally settling in Philadelphia. In 1731, Anthony became a Quaker and started research into the slave trade. His 'Account of Africa' was published in 1762 and 'Account of Guinea' in 1767. Thomas Clarkson used Benezet's text as the basis for the research for his essay. Benezet influenced William Dillwyn, who became his pupil and then assistant and corresponded with Granville Sharpe after the Somerset verdict of 1772. He died in 1784 after a short illness. In 1754, the Quakers in Philadelphia voiced their concern about the slave trade and in 1758 they decreed that no Quaker could keep a slave without risking damnation. In the same year the London Meeting of Quakers also condemned slavery and the slave trade and threatened to exclude anyone who participated in the trade. There were 50,000 Quakers who could be reached by a network of 150 correspondents. Their pamphlets could consequently achieve a large circulation. In 1804, Thomas Clarkson wrote a book about the Quakers and he once declared that he was "in spirit a Quaker."

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Teacher's Pack published by Wisbech & Fenland Museum

15 Inkle & Yarico poster 1797

16 Olaudah Equiano/Gustavus Vassa

17 Letter from Thomas Clarkson re Gustavus Vassa 1789

18(a) & 18(b) Wedgwood/Vassa correspondence

Key Question 6

What ideas sustained Thomas Clarkson during the abolition campaign?

6.1 What do we know about the influences in Thomas Clarkson's childhood?

Thomas Clarkson was born at the Old Grammar School, Ship Lane (now Hill Street), Wisbech, (**see resource 3**) on 28th March 1760, in the same year that George III came to the throne. He lived with his parents and brother John and sister Anne, in the spacious house attached to the school. His father, the Reverend John Clarkson, was very hard working, combining the duties of Headmaster of the Grammar School, afternoon lecturer in the parish church, and curate of Walsoken. Consequently all his time was filled and he was often out of the house until after midnight. He regarded visiting the poor, especially in times of sickness, as one of his most important duties and it was on one of these visits that he caught a fever from which he died on 31st March 1766. Thomas was just six years old. He was later to give a treasured place within his home to the lantern his father carried whilst walking at night, visiting the parishioners.

The Revd John Clarkson was buried at the Church of St. Peter & St. Paul, and the family moved to 8, York Row, off the High Street, a house that was owned by the widow's cousin, Lawrence Banyer. Thomas continued to study at the Grammar school until 1775, when he went to St. Paul's school in London. Thomas was to comment on the harshness of the discipline at this school, which was next to the great cathedral. However, Thomas was an able student and in 1779 he went up to St. Johns College, Cambridge with two scholarships, planning like his father, a career in the church. He was awarded a B.A. and ordained a Deacon in 1783. Mrs. Clarkson remained in Wisbech until her death in 1799.

About John Clarkson and Sierra Leone

John, the younger brother of Thomas, was born at the Old Grammar School on April 4th 1764. At the age of 13 he joined the Royal Navy, under the patronage of a distant relation. In 1790, John volunteered to go to Nova Scotia to escort 1200 Black Loyalists who wished to go to Sierra Leone. He was appointed as the first governor of the new colony known as Freetown, and served in the post for about a year, before returning to England to report on the progress of the Sierra Leone Company. But, due probably to the lack of profit and his clear sympathy with the colonists, John was not permitted to return to Freetown. He was replaced by the much sterner Zachary Macaulay. John had sailed away from the colony, confident of its future success and with the good will of the people, including "a gris-gris, or charm for his future personal protection.... prepared... by one of the ...priests of the area at the request of the king". In England there was no public acknowledgment of his achievements and he never returned to the colony. He married, and eventually became a banker in Suffolk and the father of 10 children of whom only four daughters survived him. He died in 1828.

6.2 Why did Thomas Clarkson join the abolition campaign and who

else was involved?

Whilst studying for his Master's degree at Cambridge University, Thomas entered a Latin essay competition set by the vice-chancellor Dr. Peckard. The title was "Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?". Clarkson, though he knew very little about slavery, was determined to win the prize. The research required for the task had a profound affect on him.

"It was but one gloomy subject from morning to night. In the daytime I was uneasy. In the night I had little rest. I sometimes never closed my eyelids for grief. It became now not so much a trial for academical reputation, as for the production of a work, which might be useful to injured Africa" Clarkson (1808) Vol. I p208-9

Thomas won first place in the competition, read his essay in the Senate House to generous applause, and was awarded an M.A. in 1785. He then travelled back to London intending to pursue his career in the church. But his mind could not escape the contents of his essay. He recorded later, that at Wades Mill in Hertfordshire, he got off his horse to dwell on the thought that

"if the contents of the essay were true...it was time some person should see the calamities to their end"

It took him another year to realise that he would be the one to do it. In the meantime, he translated his essay into English and went to London to look for a publisher. When in London he met Joseph Hancock, a Quaker friend from Wisbech, who introduced him to the members of the committee who were trying to promote opposition to slavery and the slave trade.

In June 1783, the British Quakers had appointed a 23-member committee to consider the problem of slavery. An unofficial sub group of this main committee had been meeting frequently and had been preparing and printing texts on the slave trade. This group comprised seven Quaker businessmen George Harrison, Samuel Hoare, James Phillips, Joseph Woods, William Dillwyn, John Lloyd and Dr. Thomas Knowles. James Phillips was a publisher and bookseller. It was to him that Thomas Clarkson was first introduced.

Clarkson soon met and became accepted by the other members of the committee. William Dillwyn introduced him to Granville Sharp, (**see 5.1**) who was trying to establish the rights of slaves in Britain, and to The Revd James Ramsey, who had lived 19 years in St. Kitts and who had written his own essay on the subject of slavery. Thomas went to stay with Ramsey at his vicarage, and it was there that he decided to commit himself to the cause.

By early 1787, both Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce were involved in the campaign. A new 12-member committee, comprised of men with different religious and political beliefs, was formed on 22 May 1787. This committee included the five remaining Quakers of the unofficial committee (Knowles had died in 1786) plus three more Quakers - Joseph Hooper, John Barton and Richard Phillips, a cousin of James, and three Anglicans - Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson and Philip Sansom. By the end of the first year, the committee had expanded to 30 and included Josiah Wedgwood. William Wilberforce did not join the committee at this time but promised them support.

6.3 What different ideas did Thomas Clarkson and the other abolitionists bring to the campaign?

Education

Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp and many of the other abolitionists, supported Joseph Lancaster's plan for non-denominational teaching of large numbers of children in schools, using the monitorial system. Lancaster opened his first school in London in 1798, using the Bible as the focus for much of the teaching. The system became popular and the controlling body was known as the **British & Foreign Bible Society**. Granville Sharp became Chairman in 1804. Sharp was also instrumental in the founding of the **African Institution** in 1807. John Clarkson left some of his estate to build a school in Sierra

Leone.

Penal Reform

William Allen, who joined the abolition committee in 1805, was Chairman of the **Anti-Capital-Punishment Society**. With Richard Phillips and Thomas Fowell Buxton (see 8.4 pt 2), he campaigned in 1808 for penal reform, at a time when 200 offences carried the death penalty.

Pacifism

In 1814, William Allen called some interested friends together to form **The Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace**. Thomas and John Clarkson both became involved in the foundation of this group, which gained much support when launched at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1816. It became known as the **Peace Society**.

Republicanism

Granville Sharp and Josiah Wedgwood were both supporters of the American Revolution and with Thomas Clarkson they also supported the French revolution in the early years. In 1789, at the start of the revolution, Thomas was sent to France to persuade them to push for abolition. He continued a correspondence with the French leaders and in 1791, went to a dinner to celebrate the 2nd anniversary of fall of Bastille, This act was criticised by a number of people, including the Home Secretary, as being detrimental to the abolition campaign. Clarkson was not persuaded to abandon his support and in the autumn of 1792, he openly talked of support and how he felt that an excellent Republic would be established. When, in 1794, seven radicals, members of the **London Corresponding Society for Parliamentary and Social Reform**, were being prosecuted for trying to overthrow the Government, Clarkson considered going to America. Olaudah Equiano was also linked with the Corresponding Society, staying with various members when travelling around the country.

About William Wilberforce

William Wilberforce was born in Hull, the son of a wealthy merchant. He went to St. John's College, Cambridge, after which, he became M.P. for Hull (1780) and then Yorkshire (1784). In 1784-5, after a tour of the continent, he became an Evangelical Christian. The Revd. John Newton became his spiritual adviser.

Thomas Clarkson met Wilberforce early in 1787 and left a copy of his book for him. Wilberforce had already spoken to others of his interest in abolition, but was initially reluctant to take on the cause, saying that he would, when he was better prepared and if no other person could be found. He did not become a member of the main abolition committee until 1794, but a sub-committee was set up primarily to confer with him from October 1787. He was known as a good Parliamentary speaker and popular - In 1789, he moved twelve resolutions condemning the slave trade, in a speech that lasted three and a half hours.

Wilberforce was the first person to put forward the idea that trade unions should be banned. This led to his friend, Prime Minister Pitt, bringing in the Combination Acts in 1799, which forbade meetings of workmen to discuss wages and conditions. In 1800, a second Combination Act forbade strikes, union meetings or the collection of union subscriptions. This decision was made in the wake of the 1797 navy mutinies against the press gangs, conditions on ships, and the Irish rising in 1798. Declining health led to Wilberforce retiring from Parliament in 1825. He died in July 1833

6.4 How effective was Thomas Clarkson as a member of the abolition campaign?

As soon as Thomas Clarkson was committed to the Campaign, he and Richard Phillips started work. Clarkson was briefed on how to answer questions of M.P.s and copies of his essay were distributed to them. He also started to find out hard facts to be used in evidence against the trade This he would do during the day. In the evenings he worked from 9pm-1am with Phillips discussing his findings. As

Clarkson wrote in his History, he was “*seldom engaged less than sixteen hours in the day*”.

In his search for witnesses to give evidence, Clarkson devised a system of questions upon the general subject. These he divided into six tables-

- *the productions of Africa and the disposition and manners of the natives*
- *the methods of reducing them to slavery*
- *the manner of bringing them to the ships, their value, the medium of exchange and other circumstances*
- *their transportation*
- *their treatment in the colonies*
- *the seamen employed in the trade*

The first section included the following questions

1. *Do not certain Natives of Africa act as interpreters between the Blacks & ye Whites?*
2. *Do not the same persons speak often several European as well as African languages?*
3. *Do not the Natives make Knives & Daggers themselves out of Base Iron?
Bracelets from Gold?
Grisgris, sandals, scabbards from Leather?*
4. *Do they not make their own leather?
Cloth from cotton?
Mats from grass?*

The idea was that the 145 questions could be used by other abolitionists to assess potential witnesses. However, Clarkson soon found that people were often hostile to being asked written questions and having their answers written down. He personally committed the questions to memory and recorded the testimonies when he returned to his lodgings at night. He found there was the additional problem of persuading people to agree to testify. In Liverpool, he found many willing to talk to him in private but no one willing to testify in public.

Clarkson soon ended up travelling widely in search of evidence. Whilst looking for two good witnesses on West African slaving methods, he boarded 160 vessels in London and over 100 ships at Portsmouth. On the 57th vessel at Plymouth, he found Isaac Parker who had jumped ship at Calabar in 1765 and taken refuge with Dick Ebro, a native trader (**see 3.3 & 3.4**).

Whilst gathering witnesses, Thomas was also collecting the items used in the Chest. He was given ‘*small pieces of cloth made and dyed by the natives, the colours of which they could only have obtained from materials in their own country*’ and crops, gums and wood samples from the Bristol slave merchants. In Liverpool, he purchased leg shackles, handcuffs, a thumb screw and a speculum oris which would be used to force a reluctant slave to eat by wrenching open the mouth. All these objects had been produced in the city for use in the trade. These items he kept in the lower compartment of the Chest (p34).

“I wished the council to see more of my African productions and manufactures, that they might...know what Africa was capable of affording instead of the Slave Trade...and that they might make a proper estimate of the ...talents of the natives. The samples had been obtained by great labour, at no inconsiderable expense; for whenever I had notice that a vessel had arrived...from that continent, I never hesitated to go...even as far as Bristol, if I could pick up but a single new article.”
Clarkson (1808) Vol. II p13

He was referring to the Privy Council inquiry in 1788, to which he showed the Chest and its contents. He also used the Chest to illustrate lectures, in which he showed that in Africa

there are good mechanics working in gold and iron and cotton mats and aprons resembling Scottish plaid. Cotton cloth made at Whydah and Benin not to be exceeded by the finest artists in Europe.”

With the collection of evidence, giving of lectures, setting up new committees and other duties, Thomas was kept very busy. He travelled almost entirely on horseback, as he could plan and vary his route, and think and read, while travelling. He addressed small groups and made inquiries by day and wrote up his findings at night. He carried letters of introduction to Quakers and probably stayed with them as often as possible. However, the task he had set himself, was often quite dangerous. Isaac Parker and others had given much evidence of cruelty to the crews on slave ships (**see key question 4**) and this led to Clarkson setting out to prove that the slave trade was not “*a nursery for seamen*”, as had been claimed. It is recorded that Clarkson knew the name and fate of 20,000 seamen. Whilst investigating the case of the killing of seaman Peter Green, he was attacked at the dockside but managed to charge through the attackers and escape. (**See Key Question 10**),

About Josiah Wedgwood

Josiah Wedgwood was born at Burslem, Staffordshire in 1730, to a family of potters. He also followed the trade and achieved fame . During his life, he was concerned for the working conditions and welfare of his employees at his plant in Hanley, which he named Etruria. He supported many causes, including the American and French revolutions. It is believed that he became interested in the abolition cause through friendship with a Liverpool merchant, who, despite the trade being the reason for his own family wealth, chose to demonstrate his feelings against the slave trade, by shunning the welcome the city gave to returning slave ships. After this friend's death, Wedgwood subscribed to every pamphlet concerned with abolition and also joined the London committee in 1787. He produced the famous Wedgwood seal (see Resource 27b) and, in 1791, he became a shareholder, at Thomas Clarkson's suggestion, in the Sierra Leone Company. He regularly corresponded with Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce, sending letters from Etruria or from his showroom in Greek Street, Soho. He died in 1795

Can be used with resources from Thomas Clarkson & The Abolition of Slavery

Teacher's Pack published by Wisbech & Fenland Museum

3 The Old Grammar School, Wisbech

5 Letter from Thomas Clarkson to Jonathan Peckover 1824

12 The *Brookes* Slave Ship

19 (a) John Clarkson (b) Josiah Wedgwood

20 (a) William Wilberforce (b) Granville Sharp

21-25 The Chest and contents

Key Question 7

How successful was the campaign in abolishing the slave trade?

7.1 Why did the abolitionists not push for the end of slavery in the early campaign?

When the twelve-man abolition committee first met in May 1787, they were apparently undecided as to whether they should focus on the issue of slavery or the slave trade. They debated the issue and it was finally decided that

“there were two evils, quite distinct from each other, which it might become their duty to endeavour to remove...the Evil of the Slave Trade...(and).. the Evil of Slavery itself.”

But, according to Clarkson, they realised that

“ to aim at the removal of both would be to aim at too much, that by doing this we might lose all.”

By concentrating on the slave trade alone, they would not have to deal with opposition to their meddling with ownership and property rights. They also felt that, by aiming at the trade, they would be cutting the ‘root’ of slavery. Optimistically, they believed that if no slaves were traded, eventually slavery would die out.

The minute books of the committee do not give specific details of the debates, but we do know that one member disagreed with this decision - Granville Sharp. He was later to record

“ I thought (and ever shall think) it my duty to expose the monstrous impiety and cruelty not only of the Slave Trade, but of Slavery itself.”

7.2 Who supported the slave trade?

As would be expected, most of the supporters of the slave trade had some vested interest in it. As Clarkson pointed out

“Of all the publications in favour of the slave trade there is not one which has not been written, either by a chaplain to the African factories [slave castles] or by a merchant, or by a planter, or by a person whose interest has been connected in the cause which he has taken upon him to defend.”
Clarkson (1786) p xvi

Slave port interest

Many of the supporters were linked to the ports involved in the slave trade. Most ships sailed from Liverpool, London or Bristol though occasionally ships left from Lancaster. There was no trade from the ports in Ireland or Scotland. By the end of the 1780s more than 90 per cent of the British ships carrying slaves to the Americas cleared from the Mersey docks. After this time, as a result of the reduced competition caused by the French revolution and Anglo-French wars, Liverpool even increased its trade. In 1799, when Wilberforce tried once again to introduce a bill related to the slave trade, requesting that slave traders be excluded from the Sierra Leone colony because of its freed status. The bill was passed by the Commons but failed in the Lords. The Duke of Clarence, who led the opposition, was given the Freedom of Liverpool.

Manufacturers of products used in the trade.

The wealth of Liverpool did not just come from actually trading in slaves, it also gained from the trade in related products, such as those found by Thomas Clarkson (**see 6.4**). Other provisions would also be needed, to be shipped to the West Indies and to West Africa for trading, such as fine china, furniture and fancy goods (**see 3.4 &5**). Research by the Wedgwood Museum into the abolition pottery (**see below and resource 27a**), showed that much of it was not marked but that it appeared to come from the potteries around Bristol which probably also supplied the trade.

Other products from Britain, that were crucial to the slave trade, included textiles, brass pots, pans, kettles, guns (made in Birmingham and Liverpool), and alcohol, particularly gin from Bristol. All the manufacturers of these would probably be in support of the trade, or at least unwilling to show any objections.

Traders of goods to Britain

The slave trade and slavery was an instrumental part of the production and supply of products that were seen as necessary in late eighteenth century life. Tobacco was grown in Maryland and Virginia. Coffee and chocolate, which were grown using slave labour, were very popular drinks even though the demand for tea from the East had increased since the duty was reduced in 1784. Sugar, a major slave labour product, was vitally important being used in cooking and as a sweetener in drinks.

West Indian lobby

Other supporters were the actual owners of the West Indian plantations. The West Indian pro-slavery lobby was very wealthy and influential, often also owning businesses and properties in England. As the abolitionists organised petitions, so did the opposition. The African traders from Bristol and Liverpool joined with the London Committee of Planters and Merchants to lobby parliament and sponsor rallies and actions. In the 1790/1 session of parliament, the West Indian interest tried to stop testimony of the abolition faction, by saying they had heard enough. Wilberforce pointed out that out of 81 days of hearings, 57 had been taken up by supporters of slavery. He managed to get extra time for the cause, but to no avail. The motion was defeated in April 1791.

7.3 How did the abolition campaign use propaganda?

The campaign used every method at its disposal including

Circulars

In 1787, after having defined their purpose, the abolition committee directed James Phillips to draw up a circular letter to be forwarded to the country, giving some account of the proceedings of the committee and to print 250 copies. They followed this with similar letters at each stage of the campaign, using the network of Quaker correspondents (**see 6.2**), and later abolition committees, throughout the country, who would then insert items in local newspapers, collect petitions or just circulate information. In April 1792, a record number of 519 petitions were sent to parliament, with Manchester sending in one containing 20,000 signatures. (**see Resource 26**). The first citizens' petition to Parliament in support of the cause was in 1783 from Bridgewater.

Clarkson calculated that in their first year, the abolition committee held 51 meetings, mostly from 6-11pm, printed and distributed 26,526 reports and accounts of debates, and 51,432 books and pamphlets.

Motifs and Souvenirs

A resolution of the abolition committee on 5 July 1787, was that *'a seal be engraved for the use of this society and that Joseph Woods, Dr. Hooper and Philip Samson be requested to prepare a design for the same to be laid before the cttee'*. The design with a kneeling and enchained African male 'in a supplicating Posture' with the words *"Am I not a man and a Brother?"* was laid before the committee on 16 October 1787 and approved. In 1792, Josiah Wedgwood, at his own expense, had a block cut from the design as a frontispiece illustrating Clarkson's pamphlet. His own factory used the design in the production of seals and cameos in jasper (ground white, relief black) (**see resource 27b**). Thomas Clarkson, who had a cameo in carnelian, noted that

“Mr. Wedgwood made a liberal donation of these...among his friends...I received...no less than five hundred. They, to whom they were sent...gave them away, likewise. They were soon...in different parts of the kingdom.” Clarkson (1808) Vol. II p190

The design became very popular and was found inlaid in gold on snuffboxes and incorporated in jewellery. Women, who could not vote or sign petitions at that time, also became involved in the cause. Clarkson was to comment that

“Of all the ladies, several wore them in bracelets, and others...as pins for their hair...thus fashion, which usually confines itself to worthless things, was seen [as] promoting the cause of justice, humanity and freedom.” Clarkson (1808) Vol. II p190

In addition to this, people collected other items linked to the cause, such as pottery, which included either depictions of ‘the kneeling slave’ or poems such as that on resource, **no 27b**. The slave ship plan ‘The Print’ was also widely distributed - **Resource no 12 (see 4.1)**. A set of Medallions was produced to commemorate the World Anti-Slavery Convention.

Boycotts

After the defeat in 1791, it was suggested, by Clarkson that the supporters boycott West Indian in favour of East Indian produce, particularly sugar. This action was independent of the main committee. In 1792, a pamphlet was produced by Wm. Fox of London *“on the propriety of abstaining from West Indian Sugar and Rum”*. Clarkson decided to distribute copies of the pamphlet personally and whilst travelling around the country, commented that

“There was no town, through which I passed, in which there was not someone...who has left off the use of sugar...By the best computation I was able to make...no fewer than three hundred thousand persons had abandoned the use of sugar.” Clarkson (1808) Vol. II p349

7.4 Why did it take so long to achieve the abolition of the slave trade?

There are a number of potential reasons why it took so long to achieve the abolition of slavery.

1. **The West India and slave port lobby** was very powerful and put forward delays (see above).

In 1791, an insurrection in St. Dominique, during which hundreds of plantations were destroyed and up to twenty thousand slaves escaped, caused much alarm. Supporters of the slave trade said it was the duty of the Government, if they regarded the safety of the Islands, to oppose abolition. On 18 April 1791, the bill was defeated, 163 to 88.

2. **General delays** - In 1792, despite a large number of petitions being sent to parliament, it was suggested that MPs vote for gradual abolition. This was accepted by the Commons, and a vote of 230 in favour and 85 against, set a date of 1796 for final abolition. This bill was delayed by the House of Lords. On 14 Jan 1796, when abolition was once again being discussed in Parliament, a number of MPs were at the opera, and once again the vote went against the cause. Clarkson was out of town at the time, preparing for marriage. After this defeat, the Abolition committee appeared to lose faith and meetings were adjourned from 12 April 1797 until May 1804. By 1800, the situation had stabilised. In 1801, Ireland became a part of the United Kingdom and provided 100 MPs with no interest in the slave trade. However in 1804, the abolition bill reintroduced by Wilberforce passed through the Commons but was too late for the Lords in that session. The following year it narrowly missed out on the vote.

3. **The Dolben Act**, though with good intentions, probably delayed abolition. This act, which was passed on 11 July 1788, limited the number of slaves carried on the slave ships. A subsequent amendment of the Dolben Act in 1789, stipulated terms of contract between captain and crew over conditions and regular diet. The act also reduced the contact crews had with African disease by stipulating that local

people must be hired to provision the ships in West Africa.

4. **Anticipated political instability** must also have had an effect. The situation in France was of great concern to many and the revolution societies that were forming caused much alarm. In 1780, the Gordon riots had broken out, after a march of fifty thousand to petition parliament to stop them lifting restrictions on Catholics. The riots lasted for a week, hundreds were killed and injured and up to ten thousand soldiers were needed to restore order. Parson Woodford recorded in his diary on November 28th 1792

“...Much talking about Mobs rising in many parts of the Kingdom especially in Norfolk and in Norwich, a great Number of Clubs about the County and City, who stile themselves Revolution-Men. A great many rich People it is said back them. It was also rumoured that there was to be a meeting of the County Mobs this day at Norwich. That there were also great disturbances at present in London.”

In 1793, the French king was executed and shortly after this, France declared war on Britain. In 1794, The Seditious Practices Act was passed and gatherings of 50 people or more became illegal. This meant that no rallies or large-scale meetings could be held.

In 1807, the abolitionists were successful. The Lords were heavily lobbied and the Bill started in that House. It was passed 100 votes to 34, moved to The Commons and passed 283 to 15. Economic factors and changing attitudes are believed to have played their part.

Can be used with resources from Thomas Clarkson & The Abolition of Slavery

Teacher’s Pack published by Wisbech & Fenland Museum

12 The *Brookes* Slave Ship

26 Letter from Thomas Clarkson 1792

27 (a) Abolitionist Jug (b) ‘Am I not a man and a brother?’ seal

Key Question 8

What effect did British abolition have on the transatlantic trade?

8.1 Did other countries continue to trade in enslaved Africans and what were the effects of this trade?

Though the United States had prohibited the importation of slaves from Africa to American territory in 1808, they had not put in place any mechanisms to ensure that the law was adhered to. The United States still needed a regular supply of Africans, particularly as the demand for plantation products increased.

Similarly, other countries continued to ship Africans across the Atlantic, some (particularly the Portuguese) filling the gap in the market that the British had vacated. However, they did make a gesture towards abolition in 1815 when they agreed to limit their trade to waters south of the Equator, thereby not trading from the West African coast and not shipping to the West Indies, Central and North America. This was not a major hardship, as they could still take Africans from the Congo to Brazil. Brazilian slave imports were to continue for at least sixty years after British abolition. In 1817, Spain agreed to the same restrictions as Portugal. It should be remembered that one quarter of all Africans who were enslaved between 1500 and 1870 were transported across the Atlantic after 1807.

Sweden abolished the slave trade in 1813 and the Dutch followed its example one year later. The situation with the French was slightly more complicated. They had agreed to abolish the trade after the Napoleonic wars had ended but with a delay of five years, during which, the abolitionists argued the trade would dramatically increase. Final French abolition occurred in 1818.

About the abolition of slavery

Once the Slave trade looked as if it had been abolished and a respectable time had passed, the abolition movement got back into action. In 1822, The Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing the State of Slavery throughout the British Dominions was formed. Thomas Clarkson was asked to give advice to the new committee. Clarkson, typically started travelling again. By the summer of 1824, 800 groups had been set up in towns around the country and 777 petitions had been sent to Parliament. Despite the public interest, government preferred to improve the conditions of slaves rather than abolish the institution of slavery. In 1830, the aim of the Society was changed from gradually abolishing slavery, to the Entire Abolition of Colonial Slavery. In 1833, women were encouraged to be involved in the campaign by signing petitions - 187,000 signed. There was also another sugar boycott, involving 300,000 people. The Abolition of Slavery in the British Colonies finally took place on 1st August 1834, with all children under six years freed immediately, and all other slaves required to work as 'apprentices' to their former masters for a few years before gaining full freedom. Slave owners were given twenty million pounds in compensation. In 1838, apprenticeship was abandoned and full freedom granted.

8.2 How did the British become the slave trade 'police'?

In the years 1808-11, two ships with guns cruised the West African coast to ensure that no British ships took part in the slave trade. In 1819, when the trade along that part of the coast had been abolished by all the trading nations, a Royal Navy Anti Slave Trade Squadron was established to cruise the coast and capture any ships found carrying slaves. The slaves would then be taken to a Naval base that had been

started at the struggling colony of Freetown in Sierra Leone. By 1840, 70,000 negroes had been liberated from slave ships and settled in the area. By 1845, Britain had 30 ships patrolling the area. France had 28 and there were other ships provided by the Americans, Portuguese and other European countries. By the late 1860s, 50,000 Africans had been recaptured from 1600 ships at a cost of £40 million.

The crews of the patrol ships were allowed to keep some of the proceeds from the capture of ships after a portion had been paid to the government. But the job of patrolling could be difficult as slave ships often disguised their purpose. In the years before the Americans became involved in patrols, ships displaying the US flag could not even be searched. The following item from the radical Wisbech newspaper 'The Star in the East' dated 27th July 1839 explains

"we learn that thirty one slaving vessels had been captured and carried into Sierra Leone and condemned, between the 1st of January and 1st of April this year; that the British cruisers had also landed their men and broke up several slave establishments on shore, particularly at the island of Boolama, a place settled by the Portuguese. The commandant of the British brig of war, 'Portage', ... (explained)...that they had fallen in with several vessels, which had the appearance of being a slaver, but having American colours and papers furnished by the council of Havana, he had to let them pass, but afterwards fell in with them and captured them with slaves on board that being proof positive of the true character."

The authorities in Sierra Leone also had to look after the welfare of the Africans that had been freed from the captured ships. After 1831, the period of support for settlement was reduced to three months, after which time they were required to leave. In 1844, this period of free subsistence was abolished, despite objections from the anti-slavery group. Regulated emigration was carried out between 1841 and 1863, with 8,000 liberated slaves taken from Sierra Leone to Jamaica, Trinidad and other islands in the West Indies. Transportation was paid for by each of the governments of the West Indies and partly by a treasury grant. Free return passages after five years were promised. The last shipload left Freetown for St. Kitts in 1863. In addition to this, 13,355 Africans were sent to British Guiana between 1835 and 1865.

8.3 Did Thomas Clarkson's plan for alternative forms of trade have any impact?

The African traders were initially reluctant to end the slave trade. As the King of Bonny reported to Hugh Crow in 1807

"We think that this trade must go on. That is the verdict of our oracle and the priests. They say that your country, however great, can never stop a trade ordained by God himself." Crow 1830 p137

However, there were still large numbers of Africans that could be used for labour. Palm Oil production soon began to fill the economic gap throughout much of West Africa. In 1800, it was used for soap and then in the production of candles. With the increase in machinery, it also gained in popularity as a lubricant and in the later 19th century, it was used in animal feed and margarine.

In 1814, Thomas Clarkson became Chairman of the 'Society for Encouraging the Black Settlers at Sierra Leone, and the Natives of Africa generally, in the Cultivation of their Soil, by the Sale of their Produce'. This society set out to encourage fair trade between Africa and Britain, and replaced the Sierra Leone Company, which had been dissolved in 1808. This project lasted until 1819.

Other products, which could be grown in Africa and traded with Europe, included ground nuts, gold, gum, timber, ivory and cotton. It was hoped that this trade would stop the slave trade. But this was still the situation in 1861 when Commodore Edmonstone on the slave trade patrol expressed this view

"...I look forward to the permanent establishment of a timber trade in the Bagroo with great interest, as it will certainly be the means of doing away with the Slave Trade from Sherbro..."

He also commented on plans for supplying the dockyards with timber from the Sherbro country, and the very flourishing trade in palm oil, cane, dye woods, ivory and a little gold dust.

Different states chose different methods to satisfy the new trading demands. The Dahomey developed their existing plantations to increase the production of palm oil by using more slaves. The Aro in Nigeria used free peasant farmers to grow crops and taxed these workers.

8.4 What can the sources tell us about later British attitudes towards Slavery and African trade?

Part 1: The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society

The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was founded after the ending of negro apprenticeship in 1839. Thomas Clarkson was elected as vice-president, but was often referred to as President. The aim of the Society was the abolition of slavery throughout the world and a convention was organised for June 1840 at Freemasons Hall, London. 5,000 people attended the convention, which lasted for 2 weeks, during which almost every aspect of the subject was discussed. The delegates and visitors came from Britain, Canada, The United States, France, Spain, Switzerland, The West Indies, Haiti and Sierra Leone. Thomas Clarkson was voted as President of the convention at the suggestion of William Allen, and he received a standing ovation during the event. A series of medallions were designed by B R Haydon, and produced to commemorate the occasion (**see resource 31**). The wording on the medallions is as follows;

GENERAL ANTI-SLAVERY CONVENTION HELD IN LONDON 1840
BRITISH & FOREIGN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY
AM I NOT A MAN & A BROTHER?

ENGLAND I REVERE, GOD I ADORE, NOW I AM FREE

A VOICE FROM GREAT BRITAIN TO AMERICA

Part 2: The Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilization of Africa. The Niger Expedition and William Stanger

The Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilization of Africa, which was instituted in June 1839, had the Prince Consort as President and Thomas Fowell Buxton as Chairman. Buxton had become the new Parliamentary leader of the Anti-Slavery movement after the death of Wilberforce. The prospectus for the Society contained the following passage

"It is the unanimous opinion of this society, that the only complete cure of all these evils, is the introduction of Christianity into Africa...as one of the principal means they ...co-opted with Mr. Buxton in inducing Her Majesty's Government to undertake an expedition to the River Niger with the view of obtaining the most accurate information as to the state of the countries bordering on its mighty waters."
Buxton (1840) p4/5

This prospectus was included as a frontispiece in Buxton's book, 'The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy'. The book also explained how the Society had no plans for colonisation or trade but wanted to introduce writing (English), medical science, roads and canals, for the purpose of 'civilising' Africa. Buxton's book alleged that, despite the Navy patrols on the West African coast, the Slave trade was still a major problem. He suggested that an expedition be sent to West Africa with a number of aims including

- the setting up of a Model farm
- the negotiation of trade treaties in return for agreements not to participate in the trade

- the establishment of schools and missions.

This African Civilization Society was a different organisation from The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society that had evolved from the abolition movement. Though they both shared the aim of abolishing the slave trade and slavery, the latter group did not support Buxton's plan for the expedition. Two weeks after the African Civilization Society had a successful meeting at Exeter Hall, London, during which Buxton introduced the subject of the Niger Expedition. The Anti-Slavery group, led by Joseph Sturge and the Quaker pacifists, held the Anti-Slavery Convention at Freemasons Hall (see above). The convention did not discuss the Niger plan.

The newspapers, particularly 'The Times' also put up fierce objections to Buxton's plan. Questions were raised in Parliament, such as why were they sending sailors into the middle of Africa when the object was to plant colonies, foster trade or explore the African interior? Surely, sailors were not the most suitable for this kind of expedition? The Viscount Ingestre also commented that he

"trusted...that the Government would not, for the sake of pleasing a few benevolent men, turn its attention so exclusively to the improvement of Africa as to forget the welfare of the men on the expedition."

They were going up the Niger at the worst time of the year. Many people wrote directly to Buxton or Captain Trotter who was to lead the expedition, about the fears for the venture. One particularly pessimistic correspondent who had been involved with an earlier expedition, wrote of his opinion that Buxton had exaggerated the figures of the slave trade problem, and had not thought out properly the aims of the expedition. He had first hand experience of the problems of disease in the region and felt that it was "not right to lead men to almost certain death". The letter never got further than the Colonial Office. Buxton ignored the criticisms and tried to keep out of the public eye even though, as it had hindered his fund-raising, he had to scale down plans for the model farm.

Not all the press coverage was hostile. Some articles appeared covering the efforts being made to keep the crews healthy and also concerning the outfitting of the three iron steamers that were to be used on the expedition. These ships were *The Albert* (Capt. Trotter), *The Wilberforce* (Capt. W Allen) and *The Soudan* (Capt. Bird Allen). There were to be 145 white crew with a wide variety of skills, as this was also a voyage of exploration as well as one to civilise the region.

The Illustrated London News for the week-ending June 25th 1842 (**see resource 32**) gave an account of the Grand Meeting at Exeter Hall in which the African Civilization Society heard a report on the recently returned Niger Expedition

..the Niger Expedition, though partially unsuccessful, had led to the conclusion of treaties with two of the native chiefs, but that having (travelled) nearly 300 miles, the 'river fever' obliged it to return, though not before arrangements had been made for the purchase of a tract of land at the confluence of the Niger with the Chadda, on which to carry on future agricultural and other civilizing experiments. The expedition had also considerably increased our knowledge of the navigation of the river,...and it had led to a further acquaintance with the habits, dispositions, and varied dialects of the native population on its border. Though the sacrifice of life was great, it bore no comparison with what is yearly sustained in enterprises of national aggrandizement or private gain..."

Of the 145 white men on the expedition, 51 died of fever. The report concluded by recommending

"increased exertions in pursuing the objects of the society, to promote the cultivation of the soil, commercial intercourse, and the establishment of the Christian faith on the continent of Africa."

The meeting was chaired by Lord Ashley, also on the platform were four Earls, five Lords, two Knights and two Bishops. Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton and Thomas Clarkson were amongst those who sent their apologies for absence.

About William Stanger (1811-54)

William was born at Tydd Gote on 27 September 1811. He was a student at Edinburgh University, gained an MD, became a fellow of the Geological Society and a founder member of Wisbech Museum. He went on an expedition to New South Wales and New Zealand in 1838 and in 1840 applied to join the Niger Expedition as a naturalist. He sailed on the Albert, arriving at Sierra Leone on June 24th 1841. The expedition travelled on to Cape Coast, then up the River Niger to the Adda Kudu Model Farm, Egga, then to Fernando Po to travel back to Liverpool arriving on January 28 1842. Stanger is reputed to have put his survival of the Niger expedition down to the hardiness he acquired through living in the Fens and fighting the 'Fen ague'. He later became Governor of Natal, dying there in 1854. He collected a large number of items from the Niger Expedition and from Natal and these were divided between The British Museum and The Wisbech & Fenland Museum.

Part 3: Lagos, Porto Novo and the Anti Slavery Squadron

About Lagos before 1850

Originally known as Eko in Yoruban, the name Lagos derives from the Portuguese for lagoon. The area was very important to the region as the lagoon provided access to a vast system of inland waterways. Agriculture was difficult in the area because of the sandy soil, so fishing was the main source of food. In the mid 16th Century, the area had been conquered by the Benin Army, and the Oba (the King) had invited the Portuguese slave traders to settle in the town. With the growth of the slave trade the town, and the Oba became increasingly wealthy, the trade reaching its peak in the 1820s-40s. In the nineteenth century, palm oil traders also settled in the town and some liberated slaves unsuccessfully attempted to settle in 1839, but ended up moving inland to Abeokuta.

In 1851, there were plans for British intervention in the Lagos area with the co-operation of the Palm oil traders, the settlers from Sierra Leone, the missionaries and the Egba of Abokuta who was sheltering a rival claimant to the throne. This rival was crowned in 1852 and a treaty signed to abolish the slave trade, increase trade in produce and promote missionary work. In the next 3 months other treaties were obtained from other local chiefs.

The Royal Navy assisted the Consul in maintaining the peace in the region for 10 years, but the chief and his successor were weak and, as well as the palm oil trade, slaving persisted from Dahomey through the ports of Whydah and Porto Novo, a small state whose capital lay sixty miles west of Lagos along the lagoon. By 1858, there had been a notable drop in palm oil supplies and questions were being asked in Britain about the situation. Before anything could be done, the Consul died of dysentery. Over the next two years, two acting and two substantive Consuls filled the post.

In February 1860, Henry Grant Foote was appointed Consul. He decided to go for direct action against the slave traders. In February 1861, to punish King Sodji for diverting trade away from Lagos to Whydah, the gunboat H.M.S. Brune was sent to Porto Novo. Foote, comparing himself to the previous Consuls, reported that he had

"accomplished in 3/4 of an hour of sharp firing what all the sheets of foolscap written by Campbell and Brand could not effect."

He had not succeeded. King Sodji, instead of opening up the lagoon to trade, had built a barrier across the lagoon, and his war canoes were behind it. Foote ordered a second expedition, which broke down the barrier and reached the town, setting it alight on 23rd April. Within 2 weeks of the attack, King Sodji

had signed a treaty with the British and supplies of palm oil once again came down the lagoon to Lagos. On 6th August 1861, the chief of Lagos accepted a pension and handed over control of Lagos to Great Britain.

A confidential report from Commodore Edmonstone on the *Arrogant*, at Sea, on 7th November 1861, to Rear Admiral Sir B Walker, described the attack on Porto Novo and the situation in the region

" 4 vessels have been captured since my last Report...King Catty is supposed to have supplied the slaves....At present it (the trade) is conducted by a Spanish Company, who employ small vessels to suit the navigation of the rivers...the River Pongas is without doubt the headquarters of slavery in this Division, and the Sherbro and its neighbourhood the market from whence supplies are chiefly procured...it is to be hoped that our new position at Lagos will have the wholesome effect in time of checking the Slave Trade in Dahomey's Country, which I can confidently assert is the only part of the Coast in this Division where it prevails to any serious extent...There is no doubt that the destruction of Porto Novo is the greatest blow that has been for some time past inflicted on this illegal traffic, and I believe it has had a good moral effect on the neighbouring tribes, and now that our traders are permitted to enjoy the same privileges of residing there, which formerly was only accorded to the Brazilians and other known slave dealers, a check will necessarily be placed on the movements of those interested in this barbarous traffic."

Resource 33 is a card with an illustration of two carved wooden figures from a set of three taken from Porto Novo. All three figures are on display in Wisbech and Fenland Museum. A label on one of the figures states " *captured by H.M.S. Arrogant during the suppression of the slave trade in 1861. Given by Captain Grubbe, 1861, through Mr. F.M. Metcalf*"

The official museum record for receipt of the figures is dated November 4th 1861. It describes the figures as ' *Three African Fetish Gods taken from the Fetish House at Porto Novo, a town in the Kingdom of Dahomey, which was destroyed in the spring of 1861 by the crews of H.M.S. 'Arrogant' and other vessels*'.

The text, below the images on the card, was written some years ago. It contains a major error in the name of the town being written as Porto Niro! The text goes on to explain that the figures were taken from a Fetish House and what these were. Some of the West African tribes believed that God was all important and in everything. They did not build elaborate churches for the worship of God, but did have small buildings where prayers could be said. There has been great debate about different spiritual beliefs over the years, and it now might be true to say that the figures were taken from a sacred place.

The figures have black staining on the hair, three strings of different sized bead necklaces (one female has lost one), blue, white and red anklets, and blue wrist-bands with black loin cloths. Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology has two Yoruban Ibeji figures from Western Nigeria (donated in 1920) on display, which are similar to these. The Yoruba welcomed the birth of twins -they were believed to share one soul and if one died, a statue was made to become the abode of the departed. The figures are females with glass bead necklaces, waist-bands, metal bangles and strands of cowrie shells hanging from their wrists. They also wear detachable fabric garments.

Can be used with resources from Thomas Clarkson & The Abolition of Slavery

Teacher's Pack published by Wisbech & Fenland Museum

6 (a) Map of West Africa 1840

31 World Anti-Slavery Convention Medals 1840

32 African Civilization Society Meeting 1842

33 Dahomey figures

Key Question 9

How important was Thomas Clarkson to the town of Wisbech in his lifetime?

9.1 How close were Thomas Clarkson's links with Wisbech?

After leaving Cambridge, Thomas Clarkson spent the summer and autumn of 1785 working in Wisbech with his brother, translating and expanding Thomas' essay for the general public. Thomas also returned to Wisbech in November 1787 to write his 'Impolicy'. His mother continued to live in Wisbech until her death in 1799, and Thomas was likely to have visited her regularly. He also corresponded with the Peckover family, who like many of his abolitionist friends, were Quakers. Much of this correspondence is now in The Wisbech & Fenland Museum. Thomas considered Cambridgeshire to be his home county (see resource no.5).

In recognition of the achievement of the abolition of slavery, a meeting of the Capital Burgesses of Town of Wisbech 26th August 1833 resolved that

" Thomas Clarkson Esquire, a native of Wisbech, the noble persevering and successful advocate of the abolition of negro slavery be requested to sit to some eminent painter for his portrait to be placed in the common hall of this town."

On 10th December, Colonel William Watson wrote to Clarkson with the request. The portrait was painted by Samuel Lane. It still hangs in the Council Chamber. The lithograph was commissioned in 1846, the year Clarkson died.

9.2 How did the town of Wisbech react to Thomas Clarkson's campaign in his lifetime?

The Peckover family were almost certainly mustering support for the abolition campaign (see below). A letter survives from Thomas Clarkson to Jonathan Peckover concerning a proposed public meeting at Wisbech in 1824 (not reproduced in this pack), **See also resource 5**. Section 9.1 shows us that great respect was shown to Clarkson.

The 'Electors of Cambridgeshire!' poster from 1832 (**resource 29**) demonstrates that the town was involved in the abolition campaign. From the poster, we cannot tell who the electors were being encouraged to vote for, but the records tell us that Captain Yorke was placed at the bottom of the Wisbech poll, though he was returned by the county at large. Unfortunately, there are no posters surviving for the other candidates.

Captain Charles Philip Yorke, RN., 7 King Street, St. James, London, a conservative, a supporter of the Corn Laws and opposed to the immediate abolition of slavery, retired in 1835 (source Who's Who in British Members of Parliament Vol. I 1832-85 Eds. M Stanton). The Yorke family, which included the Earls of Hardwick, and the Bishop of Ely **mentioned below**, also owned Wimpole Hall.

The Negro Emancipation Celebrations poster of 1833 (**resource 30**) shows that the non-conformist congregations were celebrating abolition in their chapels, however we don't know if the Parish Church held a similar service and celebration.

About Wisbech in Clarkson's lifetime

There are at least three contemporary descriptions of Wisbech in the Late 18th and Early 19th century:-

'the buildings were in general handsome...But the Bridge stretching Rialto-like over this straight and considerable stream, with a good row of houses extending from it, and fronting the water, to a considerable distance, beats all, and exhibits something of a Venetian appearance'

William Cole 1772. 'an ugly dull town, with a large canal through it in the Dutch taste' John Byng 1790. 'a good solid town, though not handsome' William Cobbett 1830.

The centre of the town changed quite dramatically in 1793 after the Castle was sold, at auction, by the Lord Bishop Yorke of Ely, to the builder Joseph Medworth. Medworth was responsible for the development of The Crescent, Union Place and Ely Place including a new theatre (**see resource no. 15**) on land that had previously been the castle garden. He later demolished Thurloe's Mansion and constructed the present building at the opposite end of the garden, with the whole being completed by 1816.

Services in the town were quite good:- In 1774, two watchmen were employed to patrol the town from 11pm until 4am ringing their bells and announcing the hour, wind and weather.

Watchmen were still being employed in 1828, with two superintendents also appointed with authority to carry a cutlass, pistol and dark lantern, in comparison with the standard lantern, rattle and bludgeon. A police force of superintendent, sergeant and 6 constables was established in 1836. An engine house was built in 1776 in The Old Market for a fire engine with additional people paid for assisting in putting out fires. A workhouse had been built in 1722 on a 3 acre site between the Horse Fair and the Quay. The inmates, of whom there were about 80 in the early years, were put to work spinning, brewing and baking. Children were also taught to read and write. The occupants had apparently increased to 1,500 by the early 1830s. Those incapable of work, the sick, aged, and very young were not admitted. The first Post Office in Wisbech opened in Upper Hill Street in 1793. The Brewery on the North Brink was constructed in about 1790. The customs house, previously the butter market, was built in 1801 (though it was pulled down in 1856 when the bridge was rebuilt, and became the site for the Clarkson memorial). The canal was constructed to take in the Well Stream in 1794.

9.3 Why were the Peckovers important?

Jonathan Peckover moved to Wisbech in 1777 when Thomas Clarkson was at school in London and John Clarkson had just joined the Royal Navy. He opened the first bank in the town, above his general shop in High Street in 1782. 12 years later, he moved the bank to, what we now know as, Peckover House on the North Brink. Jonathan was a Quaker and a relative by marriage to Joseph Hancock, who first introduced Thomas Clarkson to James Phillips, in London. Peckover assisted with the abolition campaign by organising local petitions etc.

During his life, Thomas Clarkson wrote many letters to Jonathan Peckover and later to his sons, Algernon and William, who also became involved in the campaign. Algernon Peckover and his sister married people from Ipswich and kept close links with the Clarksons when they lived at Playford Hall. As a consequence, successive generations of the Peckover family have given a great deal of Clarkson material to The Wisbech and Fenland Museum. Peckover House, believed to date from 1722, was handed over to the National Trust by Hon. Alexandrina Peckover in 1943. The nearby Friends' (Quaker) Meeting House was designed by Algernon Peckover and built in 1854.

Resource no 3. The Grammar School, Wisbech, 1847, is a watercolour painting by Algernon Peckover. It is included in the book, 'History of Wisbech & The Fens' by Walker & Craddock. All the illustrations within this copy of the book have been hand painted by Algernon, although the book was printed.

Can be used with resources from Thomas Clarkson & The Abolition of Slavery

Teacher's Pack published by Wisbech & Fenland Museum

1 Portrait of Thomas Clarkson

2 Plan of Wisbech 1840

3 The Old Grammar School, Wisbech

5 Letter from Thomas Clarkson to Jonathan Peckover 1824

28 Victory letter from Thomas Clarkson to Jonathan Peckover 1807

29 'Electors of Cambridgeshire' poster 1832

30 Emancipation Celebrations in Wisbech 1833

Key Question 10

How does Thomas Clarkson deserve to be remembered?

10.1 Should Thomas Clarkson be remembered as the greatest of the abolitionists?

Thomas Clarkson, realising that everyone else on the abolition committee in 1787 had other commitments or careers, decided that he must make it 'the business of his life'. In a speech in June 1840, he expanded on the reason for the decision

"I was literally forced into it. I was thinking of ... the multiplied injuries which the unhappy people... were made to undergo in Africa on their passage and in the colonies."

Clarkson risked his life whilst campaigning, venturing into the slave trading ports to look for witnesses, even though he knew that many of the inhabitants would not want him there. Whilst searching for witnesses in Liverpool, to the savage beating and subsequent death of ship's steward, Peter Green, he was warned that his life and his lodgings would be at risk if he brought the case to trial. Shortly after this, whilst standing on the pier watching the boats, he turned round, to be confronted by eight or nine men, including the murderer of Green. The men charged him and pushed him to the edge of the pier, in what he described as an attempt to shove him into the sea and make it look like an accident. His large stature probably saved him. He described the incident in his History

"I darted forward. One of them against whom I pushed myself, fell down. Their ranks were broken. And I escaped, not without blows, amidst their imprecations and abuse." Clarkson (1808) Vol. 1 p379

The poet Coleridge described his friend Thomas Clarkson, as a "moral steam engine" and a "giant with one idea". He worked tirelessly on the cause for much of his life, only taking time out when he married in January 1796 and retired to the Lake District to take up farming. However, the slavery issue was never far from his mind as he replied to Coleridge, when asked if he ever thought about man's fate in the next world, "How can I? I think only of the slaves in Barbadoes". During this break, he also wrote a book on the Quakers, which was completed in 1804. He then rejoined the abolition committee for the revived campaign and remained involved for the rest of his life. Thomas worked on the campaigns to abolish the slave trade, slavery and the apprenticeship movement in the colonies. He outlived all the original abolition committee and was still working in his 80s. In 1841, he wrote the pamphlet 'A letter to the Clergy of Various Denominations and to the Slave Holding Planters in the Southern Parts of the United States of America', to support the cause of American abolition. He lived long enough to assist in the formation of a world movement to end slavery (now named Anti-Slavery International), and was president of the first World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. (see section 8.4) Though partially blind (a cataract operation failed to save the sight in one eye but repaired the other), he was still signing autographs weeks before his death. Many of the pictures of Clarkson were autographed and sold as popular prints (see Resource No 4). An identical copy of this print includes the inscription

'Thomas Clarkson penned the original Autograph, (of which the above is a perfect facsimile, obtained by the Anastatic Process) in ink prepared for the purpose; about four weeks before his death which took place on the 26th of the 9th month 1846, in his 87th year. The windows opposite to the gate are those of his usual sitting room, the two above them of that where he ended his mortal career'.

10.2 Why are the memorials to Thomas Clarkson so different?

Thomas Clarkson was buried in the family vault at Playford churchyard. He wanted and received a simple funeral that combined the Church of England rite with a Quaker procession. The Quakers believed that recognising, and living by the good example of the deceased was the only way to honour them. They shunned tombstones and Clarkson's widow respected this tradition by refusing any form of monument over the grave. However, she put up no objection to plans for a simple monument by the church door and a granite obelisk was erected one year after her death in 1857.

In the biography of Thomas Clarkson, Ellen Gibson Wilson explained how talk of a statue of him in Westminster Abbey was "quickly squelched as offensive to Quaker friends". In 1996 Clarkson was given acknowledgment with the other abolitionists in the Abbey (**see below and resource no 37**).

In 1880, The Clarkson Memorial at Wisbech was erected by the town corporation at a cost of £2000, some of it raised through public subscriptions and a large donation from the Peckover family. It was unveiled on 11th November 1881. The memorial was modified, from that originally proposed in 1875 by Sir George Gilbert Scott, (who happened to be the brother of the vicar of Wisbech).

An obelisk was built at Wades Mill in Hertfordshire, near the spot where, in 1785, the troubled young Clarkson sat down by the roadside, on his way to London, to ponder on what to do about the slavery problem. It was the gift of Arthur Giles Puller M.P. and landowner of Youngbury, and it was unveiled in 1879.

10.3 How important is Wisbech & Fenland Museum for reminding us of Thomas Clarkson?

- On 28th November 1870 Mrs. Mary Dickinson, who was the daughter-in-law, and niece of Thomas (**see family tree**) donated the Clarkson Chest to the museum and since that time there have been a number of other donations from the Clarkson descendants.
- The Museum has produced a catalogue of the Clarkson collection to make access easier.
- There is a permanent display on Thomas Clarkson and abolition. This display includes the chest and other items illustrated in the pack plus other objects of interest.
- The Museum shop sells copies of this pack and various publications about Thomas and John Clarkson (see enclosed list).
- The Friends of the Museum administer the Clarkson Memorial Fund (see below).
- Links are maintained with Anti-Slavery International and the descendants of Thomas and John Clarkson.

10.4 In what other ways is Thomas Clarkson remembered?

In Wisbech, a number of places have been named after Clarkson. These include Clarkson Infants School, Clarkson Court, Clarkson Avenue, a Doctors Surgery and a Public House.

10.5 How was the anniversary of Thomas Clarkson's death remembered in 1996?

To mark the 150th Anniversary of the death of Thomas Clarkson, a £20,000 appeal was launched for a floor tablet of Cumbrian green slate to be sited in the north choir aisle of Westminster Abbey, alongside memorials to seven of Clarkson's fellow abolitionists. On the slate the following words were carved

a friend to slaves
THOMAS CLARKSON

b. Wisbech 1760 - 1846 d. Playford

The dedication of the Memorial Stone took place after the Choral Evensong on 26th September 1996. The Plaque was unveiled by the Master of St. John's College Cambridge, where Clarkson studied and wrote his essay. The service was well attended, with an address by the Bishop of Ely and was followed by a celebration in the Abbey Community Centre for nearly 300 people, a number of them members of the Clarkson family.

The balance of any surplus funds was shared equally between-

1. A fund to be administered by the Friends of Wisbech and Fenland Museum to make awards to students of Thomas Clarkson and his anti-slavery campaign, and to assist in the maintenance of the permanent Clarkson collection in Wisbech.
2. The continuing work of Anti-Slavery International.

Other events to mark the 150th Anniversary included

An Open Day at Playford, Suffolk.

A major exhibition at Wisbech & Fenland Museum (**see resource 38**).

A weekend coach outing with an anti-slavery campaign theme.

A rehearsed reading of the play 'Inkle & Yarico' at the Angles Theatre (**see resource 15**).

A special service at St. Peter's Church, Wisbech.

A Memorial service at Playford Church.

An exhibition at St. John's College, Cambridge and the University Library.

A performance of a 'Clarkson' symphony at St. Peter's Church, Wisbech.

Can be used with resources from Thomas Clarkson & The Abolition of Slavery

Teacher's Pack published by Wisbech & Fenland Museum

21-25 The Chest and contents

34 Notice of the Unveiling of the Clarkson Memorial 1881

35 Design for the Clarkson Memorial 1875

36 Photograph of the Unveiling of the Memorial

37 Westminster Memorial

38 Thomas Clarkson Exhibition Poster 1996

Key Question 11

What ideas from the time of the slave trade contribute to modern day racism?

11.1 What is racism?

'conduct or words which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. In its more subtle form, it is as damaging as in its more overt form'. Stephen Lawrence Inquiry

Using this definition, Black, White or Asian people may be victims of racism. This definition is consistent with the Race Relations Act. Some groups of people (for example Black people, Asians, Gypsies and asylum seekers) are much more likely to suffer racism. Racism is sometimes used to refer to the power relationship between White people and Black people. The basis for this viewpoint is that most of the social, economic and political decisions are made by White people and that these decisions may systematically disadvantage Black people. 'Black' is used politically in this context to unite people who are not white or who are likely to be subjected to racism (for example Jewish people).

11.2 What do modern writers have to say about the question?

The Institute of Race Relations booklet 'Roots of Racism' relates the issue of the growth of racism to the question of "Why were Europeans taken on in the West Indies as indentured servants and Africans as slaves". Similarly they ask "Why was it acceptable to turn Africans into property but not Europeans?" The argument follows that the Christian Church by the fifteenth century was strongly against using Christians as slaves. People were separated into believers and non-believers and those with different religious views, such as the Jews were persecuted. The early Christian slaves had been seen as the lowest class of society but had been given some protection by laws and customs. The African slaves were denied those rights, and for people to accept that the situation they began to rationalize that the Africans, who were physically quite different from the White Europeans, were inferior, In this way an ideology of racial superiority was created.

"For only a thorough-going belief that Black people were inferior or sub-human, could allow the slave traders and slave owners to placate their Christian consciences – for all human beings were equal in the eyes of God." Homebeats: the struggle for racial justice (Institute of Race Relations)

11.3 Could we say that people were racist in the eighteenth century?

As historians we cannot place twentieth century values and attitudes on to the people in the eighteenth century. But we do know that the sons of African traders were brought back to be educated at schools in England alongside the sons of merchants. We also know that many wealthy families had Black servants or slaves and that these were well treated. Some people at the time when Thomas Clarkson first became involved with the issue of abolition must have believed that Africans were in some way inferior. Clarkson had to address two arguments connected with this in his essay. First, in reply to the allegation that the Africans were incapable of being educated or producing fine goods or works of artistic merit, he demonstrated the fine craftsmanship (**see section 6.4**) and through the examples of African writers such as Phyllis Wheatley. The second argument was that the Africans colour, and features distinguish him from the inhabitants of Europe. To this Clarkson argued that the climate is a determining factor in skin colour and that "God hath made of one blood all the nations of men...on...the face of the earth"

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