

**The mobilisation of public opinion against the slave trade
and slavery:
Popular abolitionism in national and regional politics, 1787-1838.**

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Abstract

In the space of fifty years, the British slaving system was dismantled under pressure from an increasingly hostile and vocal public. The London anti-slavery societies, drawing on networks of provincial correspondents through whom popular support for anti-slavery measures was organised, orchestrated one of the first long-running and successful campaigns to bring 'pressure from without' to bear on parliamentary politics. Abolitionism was the first modern social movement. This thesis looks at the efforts made to mobilise public opinion in the half-century from the formation of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787 to the emancipation of the apprentices in the British West Indies in 1838. In so doing, it explores the methods adopted to raise popular support at the metropolitan and provincial levels and looks at the relationship between the two in organisational and ideological terms. While the geographical focus is principally the North of England, the overall structures of abolitionist mobilisation throughout the British Isles is considered. In particular, the thesis looks at the continuities between campaigns and puts greater emphasis on the contributions of local abolitionists in the periods between bursts of petitioning, including lobbying MPs, writing pamphlets and acting as shareholders. The early abolitionist campaign is shown to be a small-scale affair, reliant on a close network of trusted contacts, but capable of successfully forming and focusing popular outrage. The 1820s, traditionally a period which has received scant attention by historians of abolition, is shown to be a decade of transition during which the ideological and tactical framework of the final campaign against slavery was formed in the provinces. The final campaigns of the 1830s also illustrates the emergence of provincial abolitionists as the defenders of an uncompromising moral stance against slavery.

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Chapter six contains material drawn from a paper entitled 'James Cropper and the Economic Critique of Slavery,' *The Economic History Society Annual Conference Journal* (3-5 April 1998).

Introduction

BRITISH POPULAR ABOLITIONISM IN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES.

The fifty year period between the formation of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787 and the final termination of slavery in the British Empire in 1838 saw the creation of one of the first national social movements. The campaigns for the abolition of the slave trade and later the emancipation of the slaves commanded powerful expressions of outrage and opposition from individuals, congregations, trades, villages, towns and cities throughout the country. Regional activists, 'active beyond the signing of mass petitions,'¹ helped the societies in London to channel this rising humanitarian sentiment into a form of potent extra-Parliamentary pressure. The aim of the present study is to analyse the continuities and dynamics of abolitionist mobilisation at the grass-roots level throughout this fifty year period. In particular, the study looks at the ways in which abolitionists co-ordinated anti-slavery sentiment, organising public meetings and petition campaigns, to try to assess the longevity and sustainability of abolitionist sentiment and the extent to which abolitionism permeated British society. The focus is placed principally on the provinces and the work of abolitionists in the North of England. But it is the interaction between the London abolitionists and individuals and committees in the provinces which requires closer examination. The Parent Committees in London used a network of correspondents throughout the kingdom to orchestrate abolitionist agitation at crucial periods. But abolitionists were often in more frequent and direct contact with each other during these fifty years. It was the presence of other stable intersecting networks within British society which sustained the movement and its potential for rapid mobilisation and popular support. This study endeavours to construct an organisational sociology of the abolitionist movement.

Popular abolitionism has recently become the subject of specialist study, most notably through the work of Seymour Drescher. In *Capitalism and Antislavery* (1986), Drescher highlighted the extents of abolitionist mobilisation and popular support and compared their roles in Britain and France. He stressed the movement's broad social base in an attempt to undermine the reliance on the capitalist-abolitionist thesis and the hegemonic arguments of Eric Williams and David Brion Davis. Covering the full fifty year period, Drescher concentrated on mass petitioning as the most obvious

¹ David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991), p.234.

indicator of popular cross-class support. Contemporaneously, James Walvin integrated abolition more closely into the radical politics of the late eighteenth century.² These historians and others helped to challenge the existing frames of reference of abolitionist historiography, placing anti-slavery into the context of provincial urban development and popular politics. Subsequent work has not failed to build on this scholarship. Clare Midgely's *Women Against Slavery* (1992) convincingly integrated the role of women into the history of abolition. David Turley analysed the abolitionist world view and mentality and drew on provincial examples to discuss the ideologies underpinning the culture of English anti-slavery.³ More significantly, John Oldfield's work on the petition campaigns of 1788 and 1792 has provided us with a greater understanding of abolitionist activity, especially in the South of England, and explored abolition as an aspect of eighteenth century Britain's print- and consumer-culture.⁴ Abolitionist historiography is now a rich tapestry of interpretation and analysis which more consciously considers the influence of popular mobilisation on the business of national politics.

Aspects of popular abolitionism still remain unexplored. In this field, more than any other, historians of abolition have been conscious of the absence of local detail and the need for case studies.⁴ Oldfield's work has done much to correct this for two crucial years of agitation (1788 and 1792). Judith Jennings has also highlighted the work of four Quakers central to the London Abolition committee.⁵ But in terms of later mobilisations, our knowledge is slight. Although Drescher has indicated and proffered an analysis of popular mobilisation in the latter stages of the campaign to abolish the slave trade,⁶ work on subsequent provincial agitations in 1814 and the 1820s has not been conducted in detail. This absence presents an acute problem when we consider the ways in which contentious arguments within the historiography have been discussed. A case in point is David Brion Davis's hegemonic thesis from *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Davis's thesis applies principally to the thirty years after the second petition campaign of 1792, with some speculations about the early 1830s.⁷ In countering this, Drescher's discussion of industrial reform

² James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986). For Drescher and Walvin's previous works along these lines see their articles in James Walvin (ed) *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846* (1982).

³ David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860*.

⁴ John R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-slavery* (Manchester, 1995).

⁵ David Brion Davis noted this problem in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1975), pp.238-239; Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade, 1783-1807* (1997).

⁶ Seymour Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?' in *Past and Present*, No. 143, pp.136-166.

⁷ David Brion Davis, 'Reflections on Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony,' in Thomas Bender (ed) *The Antislavery Debate* (California, University of California Press, 1992), p162.

symbolism also focuses on the early 1830s.⁸ Yet the 1820s, during which notions of domestic slavery, free labour and their relationship to sustained abolitionism were being discussed more explicitly than before, has received scant attention. The 1820s as a whole remains relatively unresearched.

However, if we are to consider abolition as a social movement built on collective action, the importance of sustained activity, common personnel and continuity *between* agitations becomes clear.⁹ The mass agitation of 1788 did not result inevitably in the successes of 1833 or 1838. Antislavery suffered periods of reversal and decay which temporarily destroyed the cause, as well as times of revival and growth. As a result, the silences of inactivity between petition campaigns must be considered. It is the continuity of mobilisation of popular sentiment across the country at the provincial and national levels which is the underlying subject of this study.

One element crucial to this analysis is the role of the London Committee. In *Capitalism and Antislavery*, Drescher saw the Abolition Society as a Parliamentary lobby which was converted to popular politics by the radicalism of Manchester. Counteracting this, Oldfield has succeeded in directing attention towards the London Committee's methods to harness popular support in the earliest stages of the first campaign. Jennings has also delineated the commercial skills at the Committee's disposal. However, the polarity of interpretation between a strong central committee and a more myopic lobbyist one has downplayed any interaction between the national leadership and provincial abolitionists, or indeed among provincial abolitionists themselves. Moreover, such analysis tends to suggest a single channel for the extension of influence throughout the abolitionist organisation, namely that emanating from London. The significance of parallel networks of friendship, commerce, business and humanity is clear when one considers the dynamics of mobilisations in the provinces, their continuity with the past and the instances of spontaneous petitioning in 1814 which were not sponsored nationally. This study analyses the interaction between regional abolitionists and other supporters in the provinces, the masses and the anti-slavery leadership. It also analyses the unexplored role of the London Committee in the 1820s and 1830s.

The strengthening of the case for the London Committee of the 1780s and 1790s in recent scholarship reflects a subtle shift around the central question of abolitionism

⁸ Drescher, 'Cart Whip and Billy Roller: Antislavery and reform symbolism in industrialising Britain,' *Journal of Social History*, No. 15, 1981, pp.3-24.

⁹ See Tarrow's use of collective action and its cumulative effects in Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (Cambridge, 1994).

and industrialisation. Eric Williams's conjunction of rising capitalist forces and the abolition of slavery in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) ' was first converted by historians from an explicit statement about abolitionist personnel to an observation on the ideology of anti-slavery activists. David Brion Davis described an abolitionist mentality and ideology which evolved from and supported capitalism. While Drescher downplays the current impact of this aspect of Davis's work on modern scholarship, noting that 'historians are recognising the implications of fifty years' futile prospecting for a grand coalition of economically-based antislavery elites and their ideologies,'¹⁰ the middle-class capitalists have nevertheless re-emerged as important agents of abolition. Now, however, it is their market skills that form the underpinning of abolitionism, rather than a specific capitalist vision. The entrepreneurship of Joseph Phillips and Josiah Wedgwood has been integrated more closely into the London committee's myriad capabilities. Such a change has emerged almost imperceptibly, and largely without reference to the ever-expanding literature on the relationship between capitalism and abolitionism. It constitutes a reorientation of the debates surrounding popular abolitionism. More significantly, it threatens to remove important considerations from the existing scholarship. Popular support is either reduced to the status of a mere resource available to the abolitionist elite, or the political power of mass activity is jettisoned from the explanation of abolition's success. In considering popular abolitionism, recent historical studies have unconsciously jeopardised the 'popular.'

However, political sociologists, notably Sidney Tarrow and Leo D'Anjou,¹¹ have asserted the importance of mass collective action in abolition and anti-slavery's emergence as a national social movement. Tarrow's work has suggested an overarching framework for empirical research into the nature of social movements and has looked to the abolitionists as a suitable case study. Significantly, political sociology offers a discussion of the nature of movement leadership and its role and considers the factors necessary for sustained agitation and overall success. It also implies connections with ideas of British national identity. It is with reference to this emergent field of study that the popularity and continuities within abolitionist support and mobilisation are discussed.

One further aspect of these shifts within the historiography has been the 'secularisation' of abolition.¹² Williams's legacy has resulted in a death blow to the

¹⁰ Seymour Drescher, 'Capitalism and Slavery after Fifty Years,' in *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 18, No. 3, December 1997, pp.219-220.

¹¹ ~~Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (1994).~~

¹² The phrase is from Drescher, 'Capitalism and Slavery After Fifty Years,' p.222.

¹¹ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (1994); Leo D'Anjou, *Social Movements and Cultural Change: The First Abolition Campaign Revisited* (New York, Aldine de Gruyton, 1996).

original interpretation of rising humanity and moral progress exemplified by Clarkson's *History of Abolition*. David Brion Davis fused the influence of capitalism with religious belief in his analysis of Quaker appeals for anti-slavery measures both within and outside the Society of Friends. Nevertheless, historians are still aware that religion played a fundamental role in the practical business of popular mobilisation.¹³ Networks of religious affiliation, whether they were individual friendships, chapel organisations or touring ministries, played a significant role throughout this fifty year period in mobilising support. In the mass petitioning of the early 1830s, dissenting congregations, especially those of the Methodists, made a significant contribution to the campaign through weight of numbers. New evidence from Staffordshire and the West Riding used in this study affords ample indication that anti-slavery organisation and appeal was linked directly to the shifting patterns of religious opportunity. It is for this reason that popular mobilisation is also contextualised within the parallel religious and economic changes taking place throughout this period and especially during the second campaign against slavery itself. Such an analysis helps to place provincial abolitionism within a precise historical geography.

The focus of this study is the North of England for practical and historiographical reasons. Firstly, the nature of the continuing debate about capitalism and abolition makes the industrial North a sensible field for study although focus has shifted away from this region. John Oldfield has questioned a direct connection between industrialisation and humanitarian sentiment by pointing to the popular support for abolition across the South of England among the middle-classes who did not experience the severe social dislocation of industrial growth. Certainly Oldfield is correct in hinting at other factors in the creation of popular zeal, although the impact of the market on modes of thinking is questionable.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the North of England still commands an important place within histories of popular abolition even if one does not automatically accept the connection with industrialisation. Similarly, the connection with urbanisation is clearly important but we must not forget that the most conspicuous growth of towns in the early nineteenth century occurred in leisure resorts. It is for this reason that this study has not focused solely on the large industrialising centres of the North but has also considered smaller areas such as Beverly in the East Riding or Hanley and Shelton in north Staffordshire. This has produced an analysis of abolitionist efforts to co-ordinate collective action within smaller regions and thus added another layer to abolitionist mobilisation, closer again

¹³ 'It was religion which galvanised most people.' James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (1997), p.163.

¹⁴ This argument is more explicitly put forward by Thomas L. Haskell in 'Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility,' Parts I and II in Thomas Bender (ed), *The Antislavery Debate* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1992), pp.107-160.

to mass support. Moreover, unstudied areas of the north, such as Westmoreland, have been included, as has a detailed study of Liverpool and its changing attitudes towards slavery.

Secondly, the North of England continues to raise problems within the historiography of popular abolition when we consider the period as a whole. David Turley has hinted at a 'significant erosion of antislavery'¹⁵ in the North by 1814. Yet, the Liverpool Anti-Slavery Society was officially a partner with London, not an associated committee, and acted as a centre for tract distribution and petition mobilisation throughout the 1820s. Consequently, the North of England remains a significant testing-ground for theories about abolitionist appeal and popular mobilisation.

By taking the half-century of abolitionist popular activity as a whole, this study provides new insights into the mobilisation of support for one of the first social movements. It is concerned primarily with the mechanics of abolition's organisation and appeal at the local level and draws on new primary source material to build a picture of abolition at the grass-roots and over time. The emphasis is placed on provincial activists and the nature of their attempts to rouse anti-slavery support within frames of gender, race and class. The abolitionist organisation as a whole is treated as a dynamic mobilising structure which relied heavily on numerous intersecting networks. As a result, the interaction between the Parent Committees in London and provincial abolitionists is a key consideration. So too are the distinctive contours of mobilisation across time and especially in those geographical and temporal areas omitted from current scholarship. Abolition is also considered as a generational phenomenon, as a movement which had continuities with its past and developed a sense of this which proved important in later campaigns. The importance of a new generation of supporters was recognised by George Stephen who credited the 'young abolitionists' with an important role in the Agency Committee in his *Anti-Slavery Recollections*. The sustainability of abolitionist sentiment and how it was adapted to changing circumstances is crucial to our understanding of abolition's 'popularity.' In this way, this study also seeks to contribute to considerations of anti-slavery's role in the creation of British national identity and consciousness over fifty years of contentious activity.¹⁶

¹⁵ David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860*, p.66.

¹⁶ For abolition's place in the development of British national identity, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992), especially pp.350-363.

Part One

The Slave Trade

Chapter One

THE ABOLITIONIST MOMENT, 1787

Traditional scholarship has stressed the creation of abolitionist sentiment nationwide in the decades preceding the first popular mobilisation. But the task of finding a precise catalyst for the emergence of popular action across Britain has been neglected. Historians readily account for shifting patterns within theology, politics and philosophy which created a climate of opinion. But as David Brion Davis commented 'climates of opinion do not give virgin birth to social movements.'¹ In this chapter, we shall look first at the philosophical, religious and literary developments of the eighteenth century which undermined the defence of slavery. We will then look more closely at the events of the 1780s to identify catalysts which brought these intellectual changes to consider the problems facing black society. We will conclude by looking at the first organised body to seek the abolition of the slave trade, a Quaker committee founded in 1783, which performed the invaluable work of publicising the issue nationwide and forging a set of arguments for abolitionists which would remain unchanged for twenty years.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENTS

The ideological roots of anti-slavery lay in changes which had taken place in European philosophy, literature and theology in the century preceding abolitionist mobilisation. Little serious intellectual defence of slavery was being attempted by the last quarter of the eighteenth century.² Although this does not mean that slavery was being openly and systematically challenged, important changes in the way Europeans regarded black humanity had taken place.

The enlightened thinkers and their forerunners began to undermine slavery by applying their own rational investigation of the natural world and humanity to all branches of human activity. Their desire to challenge widely-held assumptions and to apply scientific method and rationality to belief systems led thinkers to question the

¹ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1975), p. 215.

² Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (1975), p. 95.

presumed legitimacy of slavery and slave-trading. An emphasis on natural rights and liberties, combined with the popularisation of ideas of benevolence and later Rousseau's 'noble savage,' personalised the victims of slavery and made them understandable to contemporary Europeans. Consequently, Enlightened thinkers began to view slavery as the ultimate form of oppression and tyranny and wrote of it as such in their works. Perhaps the most important thinker who took part in this international discussion was Montesquieu whose *Spirit of Laws* (1748) contained an attack on slavery which was later extracted and printed by the Quakers to aid their early appeals against slavery. Montesquieu's work influenced a generation of British (principally Scottish) thinkers who attacked slavery from a number of perspectives (judicial, moral, political) and prompted Burke to construct plans for the amelioration of slavery and the slave trade prior to the advent of organised abolitionism.³ Next to *Spirit of Laws*, the *Enclopédie* was the most influential work to link the concern for the slave into Enlightenment philosophy and thinking on natural rights. It was a principal source for Raynal's *History of the Two Indies* which performed the important work of compiling the opinions of Montesquieu and the other Enlightened thinkers on the slave question.⁴ By the mid-eighteenth century, a disparate group of philosophers across Europe agreed that slavery was inhumane and unjust and incorporated these ideas in to the fashionable rhetoric of the Enlightenment.

Theological developments also proved conducive to the emergence of abolitionism. The concept of benevolence, the duty to love one's neighbour, gained widespread currency. Although man was sinful, he still had a duty towards his fellow creatures and thus had a responsibility to the slave. A second development was a clear sense of Providence and with it a heightened sense of divine retribution. It could be expected that the sin of slaving would be punished by God, thus it was reasonable to suggest that slave-trading was a threat to individuals involved in the trade but also to the nation which allowed it to persist.⁵ The onus was placed on the individual to disavow slaving, as the Quakers did in the late eighteenth century. The important point to note is that these theological developments did not merely condemn slavery on powerful grounds but stressed the duty of all Christians to assist in its abolition. The theological developments of the eighteenth-century were a moral call-to-arms.⁶

³ For Montesquieu's importance see *ibid.*, pp. 102-7.

⁴ Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, 1966), pp. 415-418.

⁵ Anstey, *op.cit.*, chapter 5, pp. 126-141.

⁶ The union of different religious traditions within anti-slavery thought had its strengths and weaknesses but here we are concerned with the broad theological developments and how they proved conducive to the emergence of abolitionist thought. See David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991), esp. chapter 2.

These changing values have been identified by historians in contemporary literature.⁷ The rise of 'sensibility' brought readers to imagine the slave's experience, thus creating a widespread sensitivity to the problems of slavery. Meanwhile, acts of benevolence were commonly encouraged as a means of achieving personal fulfilment and happiness. Both Anstey and Oldfield have pointed to the importance of eighteenth century plays in their depiction of black people and their increasing tendency to question the morality of slavery.⁸ By 1760, as a consequence of the increased number and visibility of the black population in Britain, playwrights felt permitted to address the morality of slavery and showed 'a ready acceptance of the black's humanity.'⁹ While many of these black figures were crude representations, 'such characters did succeed in evoking more positive images of blacks than those common a century before.'¹⁰ It should also be noted that these plays also contained a corresponding condemnation of the slave-merchants and planters. The revival of these plays, especially *Oroonoko*, during the period of abolitionist mobilisation is noteworthy.¹¹

Thus, as Anstey noted, 'the content of received wisdom had so altered by the 1780s that educated men and the political nation, provided they had no direct interest in the slave system, would be likely to regard slavery and the slave trade as morally condemned.'¹² Nevertheless, this in itself did not constitute or rally popular mobilisation against the slave trade. Before we look at those who initiated abolitionist action, it is necessary to consider a few factors which acted as catalysts in this development.

CATALYSTS

Popular abolitionism was a product of the British radical tradition. Many historians, notably John Brewer, have discussed the emergence of a new political discourse from the 1760s. Extra-Parliamentary support for Wilkes in 1763, and especially in 1768, focused background discontent against a system of government increasingly out-of-kilter with the demographic and economic changes sweeping the country. Though Wilkes' supporters were drawn from all ranks in society, his most prominent

⁷ Anstey, *op.cit.*, chapter 6, pp. 142-153.

⁸ Anstey, *op.cit.*, pp. 146-150; J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and the Abolition of the British Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 23-32.

⁹ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹¹ See chapter 2 of the present work.

¹² Anstey, *op.cit.*, pp. 96-97.

sympathisers were members of the commercial and professional middle-class: 'the newspaper proprietor, the printer of cartoons, the producer of artefacts, the brewer, the tavern proprietor, and the city merchant.' These men 'had a vested interest in opening up politics, just as they were concerned to open up new markets for their products.'¹³ Their increasing prominence in British society necessitated reform of the political system to ensure a Parliament responsive to their needs. British radicalism also drew on the tradition of religious dissent and the campaigns for civil and religious toleration. These notions of representation naturally found favour in North America but they also fostered discussions of natural rights and liberties which became widespread.¹⁴ These discussions took place in a society already aware of a polarity between liberty and slavery as espoused by the Enlightened thinkers and increasingly expressed in pamphlets and visual culture.¹⁵

The American Revolution proved to be an important catalyst in the emergence of political radicalism and popular politics generally. The poor handling of the war soon weakened public confidence in the British government's stand against the colonies.¹⁶ Wilkes' moves within Parliament for moderate reform were supported outside by feverish pamphleteering. Calls for 'economical reform' found their most potent expression in the petition raised by Rev. Christopher Wyvill's Yorkshire Association in 1780. But, as Royle and Walvin have noted, the significance of the Association lay not in its moment of brief success but in its stimulation of one body explicitly concerned with a change in political representation.¹⁷ The Society for Constitutional Information, founded in April 1780, became the model for subsequent radical agitation, including abolitionist mobilisation, and numbered many abolitionists among its members.¹⁸ The SCI appealed to all ranks of society through a national network of provincial sympathisers and activists. In three years, it distributed 88,000 copies of radical titles, mobilised the provincial press in its favour, and obtained members in twenty-seven towns outside London.¹⁹ In terms of its industry and organisation, the SCI was an important forerunner of abolitionism.

¹³ John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 268.

¹⁴ Edward Royle and James Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers, 1760-1848* (1982), especially chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁵ See the two engravings 'Arms of Liberty and Slavery,' in Brewer, *op.cit.*, pp. ii-iii.

¹⁶ Royle and Walvin, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁸ James Walvin, 'The Impact of Slavery on British Radical Politics, 1787-1838,' in Vera Rubin & Arthur Tuden (eds.) *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292 (pp. 343-355), p. 343.

¹⁹ Royle and Walvin, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

Nevertheless, these groups did not find success. The political and economic history of the four years after the American war must have defied contemporary expectations. The cause of political radicalism was significantly weakened by the inability of Pitt to pass reformist legislation through Parliament. The SCI, keeping the torch alight, increasingly pressed for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Furthermore, it became clear that the loss of the American colonies had not resulted in the disastrous collapse of British trade but instead resulted in a period of recovery and economic growth.²⁰ Robin Blackburn has counterpoised the increased expectations of industrialists, dissenters and the commercial classes in this period of post-war boom with the failure of Pitt's ministry to push through parliamentary reform. As he points out, 'antislavery became a popular movement with a national organisation just at the time when radicals and Nonconformists were becoming disappointed with the Pitt administration.'²¹ More importantly, it was these groups of radicals and nonconformists who had been the students of extra-Parliamentary agitation and popular rhetoric in the preceding decades. One can see in the sociology of the first abolitionist campaign of 1787-1788 a clear continuity with these aggrieved radicals and dissenters in many places.

The emergence of popular politics explains how abolitionism found a voice and willing supporters but it does not in itself explain how abolition became a political issue. It is difficult to trace the emergence of any deliberate assault on slavery before 1783. A number of obscure legal cases in the early eighteenth century addressed the justice of slave-holding but these were disparate examples. The abolitionists, however, were quick to trace their ancestry back to the Somerset case of 1772 in which Granville Sharp brought a prosecution against a slave master who tried to deport his black servant, Somerset, to the West Indies. Judge Mansfield decided in favour of Somerset and his ruling was rapidly interpreted to mean that all slaves on English soil were free.²² Even though this decision stood, severe impositions still remained on black servants, *de jure* and *de facto*, until the emancipation act came into effect in 1834.²³ Nevertheless, the Somerset case focused discussion: the hearings and Mansfield's final decision were reprinted in newspapers across the country, along with articles on the longevity and ancestry of slavery.²⁴ When the abolitionists launched

²⁰ Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery - British Mobilisation in Comparative Perspective* (1986), pp. 141-142.

²¹ Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (1988), pp. 135-136.

²² Drescher, *op.cit.*, chapter 2, *passim*; William R. Cotter, 'The Somerset case and the abolition of Slavery in England,' *History*, vol. 79, no. 255 (February 1994), pp. 31-56.

²³ F. O. Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (1974), chapter 1, *passim*.; James Walvin, *Black and White - The Negro and English Society, 1555-1945* (1973), chapter 7.

²⁴ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

their campaign in 1787, they felt no need to argue that slavery continued to exist in Britain.

More important than obtaining favourable legal rulings was achieving a change in public perceptions. Some blacks in Britain, those who had entered into the circles of polite white society, were in a position to challenge the prevailing prejudice. None was able to counter white prejudices in the pre-abolitionist era so effectively as Ignatious Sancho, a former slave who had been brought to England at the age of two and had effectively grown up as an Englishman. Although Sancho was friendly with Sterne (who wrote him in to *Tristram Shandy*) and was painted by Gainsborough, for much of his life he struggled as a poor grocer on the fringes of London's literary society. Nevertheless, his letters, published posthumously in 1782, obtained an enormous subscription and were widely read. Although of little merit in themselves, Sancho's letters 'seemed to offer tangible proof of black attainments and black perfectibility' and were used by the abolitionists as evidence of black intelligence and ability.²⁵ Another black writer, who was to exceed Sancho in stature and influence in the years of the abolition campaign, was Olaudah Equiano. Where Sancho was quietly abolitionist, Equiano was publicly so and his impact was consequently more immediate, deliberate and effective. In 1783, he brought the case of the slave ship *Zong* to the attention of Granville Sharp thus providing the link between black and white society.²⁶ In the 1780s, he interested himself deeply in the cause of his fellow blacks and particularly attempts to relieve the distress of the black poor and to settle a colony of free blacks at Sierra Leone. Equiano's brief involvement in the Sierra Leone scheme, as a commissary, proved to be bitter and divisive but his outcry at the treatment of blacks on board the ships made him a familiar name in the press and built the reputation on which sales of his *Interesting Narrative* were founded. Equiano also befriended another black African in the metropolis, Ottobah Cugano, whose *Thoughts and Sentiments* on slavery, published in 1787, was one of the early volleys in the abolitionist campaign. The importance of the free black (and Christian) voice at this time cannot be underestimated. By their very presence, these influential figures countered the traditional image held of the black.

The problem of the black dispossessed, which Equiano highlighted, acted as a dramatic catalyst in the emergence of organised abolitionism. The difficulties faced by the black poor were exacerbated by the same forces which had seen the re-emergence of popular politics. During and shortly after the war of American independence, large

²⁵ Walvin, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

numbers of black sailors and soldiers, loyal to the King, were deposited on the docks of the Thames. Free by virtue of being no longer wanted, most slipped inexorably into London's poor black community, adding to its numbers and to the incidence of poverty-related crime. In the early months of 1786, economic dislocation exaggerated their condition. Although poverty was not uncommon, 'most observers agreed that the black poor formed a special and pressing case.'²⁷ In response, a group of philanthropists, including Granville Sharp, William Wilberforce, James Ramsay, Thomas Clarkson and Josiah Wedgwood, formed the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, under the chairmanship and direction of Jonas Hanway. Within months, donations procured by public advertisement and personal connections amounted to £800 - a figure comparable with that raised by the Abolition Society in the early days of its appeal to the public.²⁸ The number of black people receiving pecuniary aid rapidly exceeded 1,000 and by mid-summer it was plainly clear that these philanthropic efforts, although bolstered by Treasury donations, had only encountered the tip of the iceberg.

From May 1786, the Committee considered an alternative plan: the settlement in Sierra Leone of a colony populated by transported members of the black poor. The plan received government approval and in October three ships were readied. The numbers of black people who joined the scheme were disappointing, perhaps because the convoy was organised at the same time as the first transports to Botany Bay and many suspected connections between the two. But more important was the fact that slave-trading was still prevalent on that portion of the west coast of Africa and that, for many, Africa was not their home. Those who joined the ships in London faced months on board waiting for the convoy to depart. Conditions rapidly deteriorated following an outbreak of disease and a shortage of provisions which led to several deaths. Many black people became disenchanted with the scheme following the revelations uncovered and publicised by Equiano which linked the poor conditions to the appropriation of funds and provisions by one of the white leaders of the convoy. In March 1787, Equiano was dismissed for his outspoken criticism of the scheme and apparently inciting the black poor. His concerns were fervently expressed in letters to the *Public Advertiser* in the following months and were reiterated by Cuguano in his *Thoughts and Sentiments* on the slave trade later that year. Those who arrived in the colony fared worse than expected. In September 1788, only 130 remained among the

²⁷ James Walvin, *An African's Life: The Life and Times of Olaudah Equiano, 1745-1797* (1998), chapter 11. I am indebted to Professor Walvin for allowing me to read his manuscript of this book.

²⁸ 'Minute Book of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade,' 3 Vols., Add. MSS 21,254-21,256 in the British Library, London. Vol. 1, MSS 21,254 (hereafter cited as Minutes of Abolition Society, I), May 1787 to August 1788.

disease-ravaged population. Two months later, the first settlement, Granville Town, was razed to the ground by local Africans.²⁹

Although these attempts to relieve the black poor had met with failure, they focused public attention on the pressing problems of black humanity. The discussion of liberties, prompted by the war of American independence and the growth of popular politics, combined with the presence of literate Christian black abolitionists produced a climate of opinion in which the rights of black humanity could be freely discussed. The Sierra Leone scheme in particular prompted high-profile, energetic discussions within the London press, often involving the key figures in abolitionism, in the twelve months before the formation of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. By May 1787, when the Abolition Society was formed, the newspapers were primed to receive further debates over the rights of black people. Furthermore, the schemes to relieve the black poor brought together a group of energetic philanthropists who were opposed to slavery and gave them a focus for collective action. These developments acted as a catalyst in the emergence of organised abolitionism.

ACTIVISTS

So far we have seen how intellectual developments and events in the 1780s had primed the public for a discussion of black rights. This discussion was initiated and popularised by the Quakers. In his *History of Abolition*, Thomas Clarkson credited the Society of Friends as a key forerunner of the cause.³⁰ Anstey and Davis have also stressed the role of 'the Quaker initiative.' However, historians of popular abolitionism have been more sceptical. Seymour Drescher has stressed the lack of both popular and West Indian reaction to the Quaker initiatives of the 1780s. John Oldfield does not give any credit to Quaker methods in his analysis of emerging abolitionism although his work on the London Committee appears to indicate an important part for them.³¹ Yet, in both organisational and ideological terms, the Quakers played a crucial role in synthesising arguments and promoting the cause. They were also the principal agents of abolition in the localities, acting prominently in

²⁹ Walvin, *Black and White*, chapter 9; Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 1962), chapter 1.

³⁰ See Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade* (2 Vols., 1808), Vol. 1, chapter 4 on Quaker activity up to May 1787.

³¹ Drescher, *op.cit.*, pp. 61-64; Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, pp. 7-33. Chapter 3 examines the London Committee and the importance of Quaker members but their actions in the previous four years are overlooked.

all the following campaigns down to and including the final assault against apprenticeship in 1837-38.

To begin with, the Quakers encouraged abolitionism on both sides of the Atlantic through their personal disavowal of slave trading activities. Any involvement in slavery was increasingly represented as irreligious and unchristian. ✪. Reacting to earlier moves among North American Quakers, the London Yearly Meeting spoke out against slavery from the 1720s. In 1758, British Quakers were encouraged to cease any slaving activities. Three years later, avoidance of slave trading was made a specific requirement for all Friends.³² In this, the Pennsylvania Quakers had led the way. Slowly, the Society of Friends moved towards the expulsion of any Quakers who persisted in slaving. The involvement of Quakers in slave-trading was opposed by the Yearly Meeting from the mid-eighteenth century, although it was not until 1774 that Friends finally accepted the punishment of disownment.³³ The net result was a purging of the Society of Friends at the expense of declining numbers.³⁴

These Quaker strictures inadvertently illustrated the pervasiveness of slave money throughout British society. Slavery and slave-trading was not simply a matter for merchants and planters - the system required and funded a rich hinterland of business interests and industries. One has only to look at the anti-abolitionist petitions received by the House of Commons from associations of Liverpool tradesmen in 1789. Sailmakers, joiners, ropemakers, coopers, blockmakers, bakers, and dealers in iron, copper, brass and lead among others petitioned the legislature.³⁵ Quakers involved in these and other trades were subjected to much soul-searching and for many, the choice was difficult. William Rathbone IV worked hard to convince his father, a Liverpool shipbuilder, not to refit slaving vessels.³⁶ For some, however, the profits were too tempting. The Wakefields of Kendal defied anti-slavery and anti-war epistles to continue producing firearms to be exchanged for slaves on the west coast of Africa.³⁷ These strictures helped to demonstrate the extent of this 'national evil' and partly to portray it as such. One early Quaker pamphlet went so far as to place consumers among the ranks of slavery's defenders.³⁸

³² Anstey, *Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*, p. 204.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³⁴ James Walvin, *The Quakers - Money and Morals* (1997), p. 138.

³⁵ *House of Commons Journals*, 20th May 1789.

³⁶ E. A. Rathbone, *William Rathbone* (1905); Anon., *Records of the Rathbone Family* (Edinburgh, 1912).

³⁷ John Satchell and Olive Wilson, *Christopher Wilson of Kendal: An Eighteenth Century Hosier and Banker* (Kendal, 1988), chapter 1.

³⁸ Joseph Woods, *Thoughts on the Slavery of Negroes* (1784), pp. 18-19, quoted in Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade, 1783-1807* (London, 1997) p. 26.

In this way the Quakers made a critical contribution to the emerging ideology of anti-slavery. Religious criticisms of slavery, particularly those of John Woolman and Anthony Benezet, were distributed throughout the Society.³⁹ But by the 1760s the transatlantic community of Friends was also absorbing the ideas of natural rights and humanitarianism which consequently permeated new tracts against the slave trade. Benezet's *Caution to Great Britain and her Colonies* (1766) referred to such works as Francis Hutcheson's *System of Moral Philosophy* (1755), Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* (1748), and James Foster's *Discourse on Natural Religion and Social Virtue* (1749-52). — ~~*Natural Religion and Social Virtue*~~.⁴⁰ The significance of Benezet's work stemmed from the authority of his sources and his condemnation of the trade as unjust, impolitic and inhumane.⁴¹ It also represented a greater latitudinarianism than was present in John Woolman's sectarian denunciations of slavery. By the time of the American Revolution, some, though by no means all, of the most persuasive, critical and increasingly 'enlightened' tracts against slavery had issued from Quaker presses.

The American Revolution played a crucial role in pushing the transatlantic Society towards official abolitionism. David Davis has argued that the struggle for independence stimulated the anti-slavery zeal of American Quakers. The pacifist tradition within Quaker belief had paid them no favours. On both sides of the Atlantic in the conflict, Friends were seen as enemy sympathisers.⁴² It is a reasonable argument that American Quakers 'took the lead in a variety of benevolent causes, including antislavery, partly as a means of reasserting their influence, or vindicating their reputation, and of restoring co-operative ties with Revolutionary patriots.'⁴³ But for British Quakers the case is less clear cut. Why would a sect, already excluded from public life, seek to counteract its image as American sympathisers by attacking the cornerstone of British imperial trade? The answer for Davis provides the key to his hegemonic thesis: by opposing slavery, the Quakers unconsciously legitimised forms of wage-labour exploitation in Britain. But such an argument removes the issue of volition in a period when Quaker opposition to the slave trade raised serious moral considerations. Their opposition certainly posed questions of propriety among some British Quakers such as Robert Barclay.⁴⁴ Instead, the answer lies in the re-emergence

³⁹ Anstey, *op.cit.*, chapter 9, *passim*.

⁴⁰ Anthony Benezet, *A Caution to Great Britain and her Colonies in a Short Representation of the Calamitous state of the enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions*, 3rd edn. (1785). See Anstey, *op.cit.*, pp. 214-215 for an analysis of the same.

⁴¹ Anstey, *op.cit.*, p. 216.

⁴² Davis, *ibid.*, p. 222.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

of popular politics in the 1780s and the rhetoric of its discourse. As we have seen, the discussion of liberties and freedoms in the abstract was stimulated by American Independence. British Quakers were encouraged to oppose slavery by their American brethren and found a climate of opinion which validated such discussions. The Quakers too were enthused by ideas of liberty in keeping with their own sectarian attachment to liberty which went back to their seventeenth century origins.

In June 1783, partly under pressure from North American Quakers, the London Yearly Meeting appointed a formal sub-committee to consider the slave trade. At the same time, transatlantic endeavours produced two petitions in favour of the abolition of the slave trade which were simultaneously presented to the House of Commons in Great Britain and the Continental Congress in North America. In July, an informal abolition committee, consisting of George Harrison, Samuel Hoare, Joseph Woods, William Dillwyn, John Lloyd and Thomas Knowles, met to discuss the means of promoting measures for the amelioration of slave conditions and the 'discouragement' of the slave trade.⁴⁵ The importance of these first abolition committees has been disputed and it is unclear how effectively the Quaker sub-committees advanced the cause of popular abolitionism. But if we consider the extent and intention of the Quaker initiative of 1783-87, we can come closer to understanding the emergence of abolitionism in 1787-88 and the important role of the Quakers.

Seymour Drescher has argued that the work of the Society of Friends in these four years acted *against* the emergence of ecumenical abolitionism.⁴⁶ However, both the formal and informal Quaker sub-committees clearly intended to extend their appeals beyond their own denomination. The formal committee commissioned *The Case of our Fellow Creatures, the oppressed Africans* as 'a short address to the publick' [*sic*] and ordered it to be distributed 'as generally as may be throughout the kingdom.'⁴⁷ Its content reflected the Quakers' aim to convince all that slavery was 'an evil of so deep a dye.'⁴⁸ Dillwyn and Lloyd appealed beyond sectarian arguments to claim that abolition was a matter of 'justice and humanity' as well as being 'consistent with sound policy.'⁴⁹ The trade was condemned as an insult to any Christian nation and an

⁴⁵ Jennings, *Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade*, pp. 22-23; Clarkson, *History of Abolition*, Vol. 1, pp. 123-126.

⁴⁶ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p.63.

⁴⁷ MSS 'Minute Book of the Meeting for Sufferings Committee on the Slave Trade, 1783-1792' (hereafter cited as 'Minutes of Quaker Committee, 1783-1792') held in the Society of Friends Library, Euston Road, London. Entries for 26 September 1783 and 23 July 1784.

⁴⁸ Benezet, *op.cit.*, p.4.

⁴⁹ Anon., *The Case of our Fellow Creatures, the Oppressed Africans, respectfully recommended to the Serious Consideration of the Legislature of Great Britain by the People called Quakers*. Letter accompanying tract signed by John Ady (Clerk to the Meeting of Quakers), 28 November 1783, p. 5.

impolitic form of commerce. The argument they put forward in *The Case* was a synthesis of existing abolitionist ideas and presented abolition as a matter of general Christian duty. To further the aim of widening their appeal, one hundred copies of *The Case* were deposited by the committee with the Dissenters library in Redcross in the winter of 1784 to be distributed among the ministers of the Presbyterian, Independent and Baptist congregations.⁵⁰ By 1785, the Quaker abolitionists had already forged connections with non-Friends such as Sharp, Ramsay and Clarkson.⁵¹ Clearly, from the start, Quaker abolitionists were looking beyond their narrow sectarian confines.

The informal committee also sought to produce less obviously sectarian tracts and to widen the appeal of their arguments. Jennings has shown how Joseph Woods' *Thoughts on the Slavery of Negroes* condemned slavery in general moral and economic terms, and drew on Smith's *Wealth of Nations* to argue that commerce was disgraced by the trade in Africans. As a consequence, his pamphlet 'helped to broaden Quaker abolitionism into non-sectarian humanitarianism.'⁵² There is also reason to believe that the informal 'association of six' was organised independently of the Yearly Meeting's sub-committee precisely to broaden the anti-slavery appeal beyond the Quakers. Newspapers were contacted with abstracts of works by Abbé Raynal and Montesquieu which had been chosen and distributed by the informal body but which would perhaps have been rejected by the Yearly Meeting.⁵³ In Summer 1784, two thousand copies of Woods' *Thoughts* were distributed across the country,⁵⁴ and outside the Society of Friends, with tangible results. The Bishop of Chester, Beilby Porteus, delivered a sermon which was influenced by the pamphlet, and was later printed by the informal committee. By January 1785, the Quaker sub-committee could sincerely claim to have roused the discussion of slavery among other denominations,⁵⁵ thus making an invaluable contribution to the emergence of abolitionism as a non-sectarian phenomenon. Even if they had not sought to widen their appeal, their arguments would have been effective. As Turley has noted, Benezet's *Case* 'set useful signposts to the general lines of persuasion adopted for the following twenty years.'⁵⁶

Authorship of *The Case* is generally falsely credited to Anthony Benezet. See Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 32, fn. 20.

⁵⁰ MSS Minutes of Quaker Committee, 1783-1792: 22 December 1784.

⁵¹ Davis, *op.cit.*, p. 220.

⁵² Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

⁵³ Dillwyn believed that British Quakers were uneasy about endorsing abolitionist tracts which were not written by Friends. This, combined with the Quaker meeting's desire to edit and approve all official publications, may indicate the desire of these six men to operate outside the official sub-committee. See Jennings, *ibid.*, p. 24-25.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁵ The Quakers did make this claim. Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

⁵⁶ Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, p. 21.

This Quaker committee performed invaluable work by creating a canon of abolitionist writing. Abolitionists throughout our period, but especially in 1787, sought out antecedents, instigators and ‘coadjutors’ (in Clarkson’s words) to validate their own arguments. A compendium of these arguments was created and publicised by the Quaker sub-committee. To Quaker epistles and the pamphlets of Woolman, Benezet and Woods were added important extracts from Abbé Raynal’s *History of the East and West Indies*, Montesquieu’s *L’Esprit des Lois*, and Smith’s *On the Wealth of Nations*. In true Quaker fashion, these and other extracts were numbered and each circulated around the newspapers until they had all been printed.⁵⁷ At the time, this was the most systematic attempt to accumulate and widely publicise the anti-slavery opinions of respected thinkers. When one looks at early abolitionist tracts written during the organised campaign, the importance of this canon is readily apparent. The Manchester abolitionist Thomas Cooper’s *Letters on the Slave Trade* (1787) drew on Wesley, Sharp, the Somerset case, Ramsay, and Clarkson’s essay and included references to Abbé Reynal, the sermon of Bishop Porteous and the Liverpool poets Edward Rushton and William Roscoe - all of which were connected to this canon created by the Quakers.⁵⁸ Cooper’s *Letters* were subsequently absorbed into these canon.⁵⁹ These writings contained key evidence and arguments which could be plundered by popular writers during the early stages of agitation. They could also be looked upon, especially after the success of petitioning in 1788, as the unfurling of Providential design - in true Whig fashion, the canon praised the intellectual forerunners of abolitionism. By compiling an abolitionist canon, the Quakers made it possible for there to be, as Walvin has argued, ‘a clear, direct and unbroken line of descent from anti-slavery as an abstract intellectual issue to anti-slavery as the substance of practical politics and reform.’⁶⁰

One can also refute Drescher’s claim that the ‘Quaker agitational style’ had a ‘self-limiting tendency.’⁶¹ The methods adopted by the two sub-committees in the four years preceding popular mobilisation show that the Society of Friends was certainly not ignorant of the immense organisational advantage at their disposal in the form of the Quaker network. In December 1784, *The Case* was sent to all the Quarterly Meetings with an accompanying letter.⁶² This network continued to be used

⁵⁷ Thompson-Clarkson collection (3 Vols.), Society of Friends Library, London. Vol. 2, partial minutes of the Quaker committee, 1783-1792: 22 July 1783 to 6 July 1784.

⁵⁸ Thomas Cooper, *Letters on the Slave Trade: first published in Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle; and since re-printed with additions and alterations* (Manchester, 1787), p. 8.

⁵⁹ Anon [Hackney Society?], *Considerations on the Slave Trade; and the consumption of West India produce* (Hackney, 1791).

⁶⁰ James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (1986), p. 98.

⁶¹ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 63.

⁶² MSS Minutes of Quaker committee, 1783-1792: 20 August 1784 to 24 December 1784.

throughout the full fifty years of popular mobilisation. Low-key Parliamentary lobbying also played an important role but seems to have resulted in only a few conversions.⁶³ Nevertheless, both Quaker committees also undertook more popular endeavours and used the network of provincial newspapers to their advantage. Jennings notes that the informal committee contacted newspaper editors in Norwich, Bath, York, Liverpool, Bristol, Cork, Dublin, Kent, Sherborne, Newcastle and London with groups of articles which were circulated among them for publication in the second half of 1783.⁶⁴ These were the first actions undertaken by the informal committee, made before their lobbying of individual MPs and they perhaps indicate an awareness of the tactical benefits of creating a climate of opinion nationally before pressing abolition on Parliament. At the end of 1784, the formal committee obtained a list of Justices in the South East to whom *The Case* was sent.⁶⁵ They also recommended its distribution across Scotland to the Yearly Meeting.⁶⁶ In February 1785, Anthony Benezet's *Caution* was disseminated nationwide 'in the same manner and proportion as *The Case*.'⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the Quaker sub-committees did concentrate more on converting West Indian traders and planters to the cause rather than organising public pressure. That they sought to do this, despite the strength of the West India interest, should not surprise us. Quaker quietism favoured rational arguments and Parliamentary lobbying over popular agitation (an aspect of politics in the 1780s which had only proved partially effective in the Wilkes affair). Furthermore, the long tradition within Quaker strictures of discontinuing their own slaving activities made such an appeal to fellow businessmen a logical correlative. More importantly their attack reflected a decades-old struggle to balance their own worldly ideal with a membership which was wealthier per head than that of any other sect in the late-eighteenth century. Pamphlets such as Woods' *Thoughts on Slavery*, and to some extent *The Case*, indicate the general reorientation of ideas of wealth and charity within the Quaker mentality. The demonisation of the traffic in Africans as an immoral and unjust business which disgraced trade helped to legitimise wealth earned from other forms of commerce.⁶⁸

⁶³ *Ibid.*, January 1784 to May 1784.

⁶⁴ Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

⁶⁵ MSS Minutes of Quaker committee, 1783-1792: from December 1784. This work may have inspired similar efforts made by Manchester abolitionists in 1787, see chapter 2 of the present work.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 December 1784, 24 December 1784.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 February 1785. Anthony Benezet, *Caution to Great Britain* (1785).

⁶⁸ Davis, *Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, chapter 5 contains the most concise discussion of this reorientation and its 'hegemonic' effects. Davis may however undervalue the religious imperative behind the Quaker initiative and treat it too simplistically as a pragmatic assertion of the Quaker right to wealth, see chapter 6 of the present work. For other general points on commerce disgraced see Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 19; Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

Joseph Woods accepted but qualified Adam Smith's economic philosophy, arguing slavery was inefficient but approving of acts of benevolence and charity to relieve suffering. This critical consideration can be seen as clearly in the early 1780s within the Quaker sub-committees as in the works of James Cropper a half-century later.

The minute books of the committees also show that British Quakers clearly sought to convert the West India interest to the cause. Firstly, copies of *Thoughts on Slavery* and the circulated anti-slavery articles were sent to Bristol and Liverpool, the leading slave ports.⁶⁹ When Clarkson arrived in Bristol in 1787, he found that the Men's Monthly Meeting had already circulated numerous tracts among the port's trading elite.⁷⁰ In 1786, twenty five copies of Benezet's *Caution* were also sent to the Chamber of Commerce at Glasgow.⁷¹ Secondly, the formal committee made efforts in 1785 to collect 'strong testimonials of the advantages which have arisen to those who cleared their hands of that evil [as a means] of weakening many objections made by interested persons.'⁷² Naturally, their source was their Quaker brethren in North America who had turned against slave-holding. This information was to be used tactically to convince the West Indian interest and was not for widespread public consumption.⁷³ Thus, the Quakers by way of propaganda and example helped to press abolitionist considerations on West Indians.

These efforts did not however result in a general discussion of the slave question among the general public. Drescher has noted how the West Indian interest seemed unconcerned by the 'Quaker initiatives'. It is true that little of the Quaker activity was explicitly popular. No attempts, for instance, were made to raise petitions across the country. But the dissemination of respectable abolitionist tracts and the inclusion of anti-slavery articles in the press is significant because they invigorated the Quaker network across the country. As we shall see, Quakers in the provinces were prominent participants in the campaigns of 1788 and 1792 - one-third of the petitions raised across Britain in the latter campaign may be reasonably attributed to their agency. The London Abolition Society inherited an enthused nationwide community. Anstey calculated a network of 150 Quaker correspondents in the provinces by December 1784. Some acted as recipients for the quarterly meetings who were sent copies of *The Case* in the same month. Thus the tracts instantly reached many more readers: in total,

⁶⁹ Jennings, *op.cit.*, p.30.

⁷⁰ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson - A Biography*, 2nd edn. (York, 1996), p. 30.

⁷¹ MSS Minutes of Quaker Committee, 1783-1792: 23 June 1786.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 30 September 1785. Dillwyn was ordered to collect useful extracts from North American Quakers.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14 August 1786.

11,000 copies were distributed through the correspondents.⁷⁴ The London Committee's own list of over 130 names drew directly on the personal contacts of the committee's membership, three-quarters of whom were Friends.⁷⁵ Historians agree that there is strong continuity between the Quaker sub-committees and the London Abolition Society. Nevertheless, the importance of energising the Quaker network and its role in the following years has been consistently undervalued.

The most obvious aspect of the Quaker network, its transatlantic nature, has already been touched upon. But the organisation of Quaker lives at the national and provincial levels was similarly fundamental to the cause of abolition. The system of local, regional and national meetings forged and regulated a uniform Quaker culture. James Walvin has shown how the structure of the Society of Friends and the frequent interchange between Quakers remained fundamental to the way in which their religious and commercial lives were conducted.⁷⁶ This organisation brought Quakers into regular contact with each other and fostered the expanding networks of trade and business within the Society of Friends both nationally and internationally. The meeting was part of *being* a Quaker. Friends were also bound to the 'living fellowship' of Quakerism through the travelling ministries.⁷⁷ These itinerant preachers reinforced the multi-faceted nature of the Quaker network as a religious, social, familial and commercial organisation, often through their own mercantile endeavours.⁷⁸ It seems reasonable to suppose that the same is true for the later period among provincial sympathisers, supported by the emergence of Quaker schools. The Quaker system provided a stable channel for distribution and organisation. Through it, British Friends were sensitised to the issue of slavery in the 1780s.

It is important to value not only the organisational capacity of the Society of Friends but also that of individual Quakers. The importance of the meetings structure as a communications network extends beyond the distribution of epistles from the centre. The contours of trade and business which criss-crossed Quaker Britain were also channels for the transmission of anti-slavery material. If one looks at the banking connections of the Pease, Backhouse and Gurney families in the North East, or the business network of the Lloyd, Sturge and Cropper dynasties emanating from the

⁷⁴ Anstey, *op.cit.*, p. 231; Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

⁷⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, 1: entries for July 1787.

⁷⁶ Walvin, *The Quakers*, chapter 5.

⁷⁷ The phrase is Davis's. Davis also stresses the 'social implications' of this extensive communications network and has seen a central role for the travelling ministries in the education and recruitment of the early Quaker anti-slavery leaders. Davis, *Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, pp. 226-228.

⁷⁸ On the travelling ministries and business see Angus J. Winchester, 'Ministers, Merchants and Migrants: Cumberland Friends and North America in the Eighteenth Century,' *Quaker History*, 80 (1991), pp. 85-99.

Midlands, one can see trade acting as an important conduit for social, familial and anti-slavery enterprise. At the most basic level, we can see this in a letter from William Tuke in York to his brother in London in December 1791. On one side, William outlined details of a visit from Clarkson and the state of abolitionist feeling in the city while on the reverse, he noted the latest accounts for their imports of coffee and tea.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the mercantile success of many Friends meant that the Quaker network was not only an important source of provincial organisation but also of capital. As we shall see, the cause was frequently saved from bankruptcy by the Yearly Meeting and the donations of individual Quakers.

An appreciation of the work of these Quaker pioneers provides new insights both into the origins of the anti-slavery movement and the nature of its organisation over the next fifty years. In particular, the role played by the Society of Friends committee in compiling and disseminating an abolitionist canon has been underestimated. Moreover, it has been shown that these Quaker bodies looked beyond the narrow confines of their own sect to engineer a more general change of opinion about the slave trade both among the public and in the slave-trading ports of Britain. Following this early work, the scandal of the poor black community in London, and the attempts to save them, highlighted key anti-slavery issues and brought sympathisers together in a non-denominational co-operative enterprise which inspired the creation of the Abolition Society in May 1787. This society once again relied on the organisational strength and membership of the Society of Friends. The work of political sociologists would appear to reinforce this view. Sidney Tarrow has suggested that successful movements are dependent on pre-existing social networks.

‘The best that organisers can hope for in the long run is to construct or utilise loose links between networks of activists who have ties of solidarity and are interdependent. Such networks are most natural when they emerge from occupational, neighbourhood or familial ties... they endure longer and are more likely to produce an ongoing social movement when they are rooted in pre-existing social ties, habits of collaboration and the zest for planning and carrying out collective action that comes from common life.’⁸⁰

The structure of national and regional meetings, the shared bonds of religious duty and belief, and the commercial acumen of Friends gave the London abolitionists a strong basis for practical and efficient nationwide mobilisation. The Quaker network was a conduit for abolitionism which ran throughout the country. Furthermore, it was a

⁷⁹ Letter from William Tuke to Henry Tuke, 12 December 1791, in Tuke Papers, Box 3 held in the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York.

⁸⁰ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement - Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 150.

permanent organisation which could be used time and again and would transcend its first abolitionist generation.



Chapter Two

THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN, 1787-1790.

Abolitionist support nationwide did not materialise overnight, nor was it encouraged from nothing. Across the country, ties of affiliation of various kinds linked members of the London Society to friends further afield. Often these connections were direct and familial, sometimes indirect or through lines of business. Historians have tended to view the co-ordination of anti-slavery efforts across the country in two-dimensional terms. Early works, which did not seek to address the issue of popular mobilisation but which concentrated on Parliamentary politics, assumed that petitioning was a reflex action of the movement in Parliament. In 1986, Seymour Drescher, in his pioneering study of popular abolition, argued that abolitionist mobilisation was more autonomous and influential than had previously been considered. Accordingly, he suggested that supporters in Manchester inaugurated the nationwide petition campaign of 1788 and thereby converted the London group, 'which was little more than a low-key lobby,'¹ into an active, extra-Parliamentary social movement. This thesis has been qualified by John Oldfield who has restored to the London Committee a greater sense of its pioneering, co-ordinating activities. However, both interpretations envisage one line of connection between the metropolis and the provinces: either London influenced the localities or the localities influenced London. Yet, as our understanding of the 'culture' of anti-slavery has increased, through the works of David Turley, Clare Midgley and others, it has become apparent that ties of affiliation, in various guises, underpinned co-ordinated action against the slave trade and later against the institution of slavery itself. The London group established an interlocking network of 'country correspondents' on this basis, using their own personal connections to reach into the provinces, while provincial supporters recruited friends nearby to extend the anti-slavery appeal. The world of middle-class Britain in the eighteenth century was a small one, a fact which aided abolitionist organisation.

The advantages and disadvantages of parallel ties of affiliation become more obvious when we consider the 'popular' aspect of mobilisation and its decline. As these connections were part of the fabric of everyday life, the abolitionist movement could fall into silence without seriously damaging the chances of subsequent mobilisation. Political sociologists have indicated that these 'abeyance structures' allowed

¹ Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery - British Mobilisation in Comparative Perspective* (1986), p. 67.

movements to suspend public activity but to maintain connections in a way which could allow their survival during periods of repression. Furthermore, these same connections allowed for rapid activity on request: a requisition or advertisement could be quickly raised by groups of friends or colleagues without the need to rely on cumbersome and time-consuming committee meetings. The disadvantage, however, was that this organisation was exclusive, limited only to those who fell within the network of personal connections. It is unlikely that many middle-class agitators counted within their immediate circle artisans or members of the labouring classes who, if sufficiently prominent, could raise the numerous signatures which were obtained from their own circles. It is for this reason that the London Society encouraged the foundation of country committees. Firstly, these bodies guaranteed that the slave trade question would be regularly discussed by supporters without itself falling into abeyance amid the other conflicting and more immediate concerns of active groups of associates. Secondly, committees had an official status which added respectability to philanthropic endeavours, such as raising subscriptions, as well as giving the appearance of accountability. And, thirdly, the actions of activists moved from the private to the public sphere, thus allowing for the incorporation of support from across the social scale and not merely the narrow confines of the group of activists. In this chapter, we will explore the role of the country correspondents and the first petition campaign of 1788. In chapter three, the specific circumstances of the 1792 campaign come under close scrutiny. Chapter four explores the nature of these networks and affiliations at the local level.

THE COUNTRY CORRESPONDENTS

The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed in May 1787 as a consequence of the interaction of a number of parallel endeavours. Its principal duty, 'procuring such Information and Evidence, and for distributing Clarkson's Essay and other Publications, as may tend to the Abolition of the Slave-Trade,' acknowledges the existence of prior efforts. The Quaker sub-committee had already compiled and distributed an abolitionist canon which included Clarkson's *Essay*. Evidence was already being compiled: Clarkson and Richard Phillips had begun such a project in the winter of 1786.² The importance of the contact made between anti-slavery sympathisers across the country from these prior endeavours is also obvious from the early minutes of the new society. Two weeks after the formation of the Society,

² Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson - A Biography*, 2nd edn. (York, 1998), p. 18.

William Rathbone of Liverpool was paid for obtaining copies of the port's muster rolls, documents which were ordered by Clarkson and Phillips not the Abolition Society. At the same meeting, a poem entitled *The Wrongs of Africa* by Rathbone's friend, William Roscoe, was presented to the Committee by John Barton, a London Quaker on the sub-committee and a friend of the Liverpool abolitionists.³ The Quaker sub-committee had provided the focus for these early exertions, but the new Abolition Society's intention was to create a non-sectarian lobby with contacts in both Houses of Parliament and a nationwide organisation of correspondents and supporters to lay claim to the national voice.

From the start, the London Society was dependent on the private and professional contacts of members of the committee and their acquaintances. Each committee member was asked to circulate twelve copies of a letter announcing the formation of the Society among their friends nationwide. The names of those contacted were compiled into a working list of 130 'country correspondents' in mid-July 1787.⁴ This list provided the basis for the London group's efforts to mobilise support across the country and indicates the importance of some networks in these formative months over others. The Quaker network was of prime importance. The Society of Friends had an approximate membership of 50,000 people, co-ordinated through a network of one hundred and fifty correspondents.⁵ Judith Jennings has positively identified forty-three Quakers on the list - one-third of those named - although the actual total is probably much higher. In his *History*, Clarkson estimated that ninety percent of those on the master list belonged to the Society of Friends.⁶ This should not surprise us because the original London Committee of twelve members contained nine Quakers, five of whom had served on the Meeting for Sufferings sub-committee. James Phillips the printer provided half of the names from among his business associates which no doubt included many Quakers.⁷ The Society of Friends had also previously contacted provincial Friends to support abolitionism: the Bristol Men's Monthly Meeting had

³ MSS 'Minute Books of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade', Add. MSS 21,254-21,256 (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Abolition Society, I'), entry for 7 June 1787.

⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 22 June 1787, 17 July 1787, 20 July 1787. John Oldfield numbers the list at 132 names, *op.cit.*, p. 43. Thirty-six names appear on the first list of 17 July 1787 (one, Robert Maddock of Berkshire, in parentheses), and ninety-nine on the second list of 20 July 1787 (five names are indicated by lines, evidently indicating a contact but unable to insert the name). I have deducted the five uncertain names from the second list and included all of those on the first list to obtain a list of 130 country correspondents. Jennings suggests that there were 116 names but her footnotes indicate that she did not include the list of 17 July 1787. Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 38 and p. 49 *fn* 15.

⁵ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

⁶ Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

⁷ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 43. Oldfield only stresses business contacts though many were also Quakers.

been involved in distributing anti-slavery tracts since 1785.⁸ Furthermore, the Quaker network, a tight-knit and responsive community through its interlocking system of meetings, ensured that local supporters were reliable and hard-working advocates of the cause.

The importance of the Quaker connection is underscored by the details of Clarkson's first tour for the Abolition committee which began in June 1787. The sub-committee appointed to assist and advise Clarkson in his investigations consisted entirely of Quakers. Friends provided Clarkson with letters of introduction to fellow Friends just as they had during an earlier tour made by Clarkson to the slave ports in the preceding winter.⁹ In Bristol, eight of the nine sympathisers to whom Clarkson was introduced were Friends.¹⁰ In Somerset, the Quaker Ball family provided accommodation and contacts. In Lancaster and Liverpool, Clarkson found ready support from William Jepsom, William Rathbone and Isaac Hadwen, all members of the Society of Friends.¹¹ It is worth noting that several of these families were not included in the Society's master list, indicating that, although well-represented on the list, the Quaker influence was greater still. Clearly, Friends established the beachhead for abolitionist activity in the provinces. One such important example is Manchester where the Quakers Joseph Atkinson, John Routh and Isaac Moss spread abolitionist propaganda among the members of the local Literary and Philosophical Society, to men like Walker and Cooper and the influential members of the Cross Street Unitarian chapel.¹² It is also possible that provincial Quakers provided the London Society with yet more sympathetic names. In June 1787, the Yearly Meeting was held in London where E. M. Hunt has suggested the names of Walker and Cooper were recommended to the London committee.¹³ Moreover, Quaker connections were transatlantic. William Dillwyn, a loyalist American Quaker from Pennsylvania and one of the most active members of the London Committee, undertook correspondence with Benjamin Rush and the Philadelphia Society whose activities were frequently noted in abolitionist propaganda.¹⁴

⁸ Peter Marshall, *The Anti-Slave Trade Movement in Bristol* (Bristol, 1968), pp. 1-2.

⁹ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 18. Phillips had provided the earlier letters for Clarkson.

¹⁰ Peter Marshall, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-2.

¹¹ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade*, Vol. I, pp. 293-294, 320, 371, 410.

¹² Atkinson had attended the Yearly Meeting in 1783 and had signed the Society's petition against slavery. E. M. Hunt, 'The Anti-Slave Trade Agitation in Manchester,' *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 79 (1977), pp. 46-72, esp. p. 47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 48. It is equally possible that Walker was introduced to the committee by James Phillips with whom he had business dealings.

¹⁴ Clarkson, *History*, Vol. I, p. 444; David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991), p. 201.

The Quakers are the easiest group of supporters to identify on the master list and should have been the most obvious group considering the predominance of Friends on the committee. Other personal connections, however, fed into abolitionism. The evangelical friends of the Clapham Sect extended far beyond the metropolis. Wilberforce was personally acquainted with Rev. William Mason and Dr. Burgh in York, Rev. James Wilkinson, vicar of Sheffield, and Rev. Thomas Clarke in Hull (who married his sister). All four men were active in their respective local committees and organised subscriptions for the national funds: Dr. Burgh was later one of the 'white negroes' who helped Clarkson and others to produce the abstract of Privy Council evidence.¹⁵ Rev. Thomas Gisborne and Beilby Porteus, the Bishop of London, who sat on the fringes of the Clapham Sect, were also brought into the circle.¹⁶ Clarkson also recruited some prominent Anglican circles: the Bishop of Chester, Archdeacon Plymley and Rev. William Leigh of Norwich (who later became chairman of the local committee and a pamphleteer for the cause under the name 'AFRICANUS').¹⁷ Perhaps a little more under-represented, despite their obvious attachment to the cause, were non-conformists. Nevertheless, among those named were the Liverpool Unitarian William Roscoe, the Walkers of Rotherham (sons of Joshua Walker who founded the Rotherham Independent College¹⁸), and Dr. Priestley who provided a link to the Birmingham Lunar Society. John Oldfield has also suggested that James Phillips, who provided so many names, drew on his own business contacts including Josiah Wedgwood in the Potteries.¹⁹ Some of Granville Sharp's contacts from the SCI, notably Major Cartwright, also appear on the list.

This initial list allowed the abolitionists to reach into the country. Undoubtedly, some of those named felt unable, were unwilling or were slow to assist the cause: William Fairbank of Sheffield, for example, was not listed as a member of the local committee in 1788.²⁰ But where initial contacts failed, others took their place. Clarkson's *History* carefully extracts the names of correspondents from the minute books of the London Society. From August 1787, new correspondents appeared, such as Thomas Butterworth Bayley and George Lloyd, both friends of Thomas Walker, the initial Manchester contact, and Major Cartwright and John Charlesworth for Nottingham. The accumulation of contacts snowballed in early 1788 as *ad hoc* committees of local

¹⁵ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

¹⁶ Michael L. Walker, 'William Wilberforce at Rotherham,' *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, No. 8 (1959), pp. 54-55.

¹⁷ Clarkson, *History*, I, p. 497.

¹⁸ Walker, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁹ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

²⁰ *Sheffield Register*, 19 January 1788.

friends and associates were formed to carry out the business of petitioning.²¹ Some friendships spanned local committees: Samuel Walker of Rotherham, an Independent with whom Wilberforce corresponded, knew both Samuel Shore and James Wilkinson, both of whom sat on the Sheffield Committee.²² In the early months of the Abolition Society, these 'country correspondents' were the men who inserted articles in newspapers, distributed pamphlets and raised subscriptions from their immediate circle. They were also the men who raised the first nationwide abolitionist petitions.

THE MANCHESTER EXAMPLE AND PETITIONING, 1787-1788

So far we have seen how the members of the London Committee drew on their personal and professional contacts to establish a network of provincial sympathisers. But it was not the intention of the committee to rely purely on these local supporters to raise appeals from the provinces. The abolitionists knew that they had to create a climate of opinion throughout the country which would reinforce their exertions within Parliament. Such support was dramatically expressed in the early months of 1788 when over one hundred petitions appealing for the abolition of the slave trade were presented to Parliament. The role of Manchester in this respect is of crucial importance. In December 1787 the Manchester abolition committee raised the first petition against the slave trade in the national campaign. The resolutions of the Manchester meeting were printed in the London and all the provincial newspapers with an appeal to fellow sympathisers to raise their own petitions. A circular was also sent to the chief magistrates of the principal towns across the country appealing for their assistance.²³ Within weeks, petitions were being raised in most of the large towns in the kingdom. Historians are divided on Manchester's importance. In 1959, E. M. Hunt argued that Manchester's abolitionists led the way in petitioning, an interpretation reiterated by Roger Anstey and Seymour Drescher. More recently, John Oldfield has argued that the London Society was not reluctant to petition and that it, to some degree, controlled the work of abolitionists in Manchester at the end of 1787. If we are to understand the importance of Manchester's decision to petition in December 1787, and its precise results, we must quantify the extent and effect of the London Society's work during its first six months and estimate how far their efforts were calculated to procure petitions.

²¹ Names of local associates were transmitted to London. See Clarkson, *History*, I, chapters XXI and XXII for the names of many of these individuals.

²² Walker, *op.cit.*, p. 54, 63.

²³ *Manchester Mercury*, 1 January 1788.

Although the London's Society's efforts were limited, they appear to have been effective. The Society produced only two pamphlets in 1787. The first was Thomas Clarkson's *Summary View of the Slave Trade and of the Probable Consequences of its Abolition* (1787), a short pamphlet extracted from his Cambridge essay which was too long for general circulation.²⁴ The second was an open letter from Robert Boucher Nicholls, the Dean of Middleham in Yorkshire, a volunteer correspondent, to the treasurer of the London Society.²⁵ 5,000 copies of each of these publications were distributed by the end of the year and both were short and easy to read. The Dean of Middleham's letter, perhaps because it was shorter than Clarkson's *Summary View*, was later printed in part and in full in the provincial press, especially from the beginning of 1788 after the production of a new print-run and the beginning of the petition campaign.²⁶ The Committee also republished Wesley's *Thoughts on Slavery* which was available for publication from the end of August.²⁷ These pamphlet rapidly found their way into general circulation, partly through Clarkson who distributed copies of his *Summary View* during his tour, leaving copies with the active Quaker committee at Bristol and with other individuals.²⁸ The Abolition Society also produced its own subscription lists which were distributed with copies of a circular letter which outlined the intentions of the society and the membership of its Committee. Within two weeks of the formation of the Abolition Society, subscriptions approached £240 and it was decided to print 2,000 copies of the list.²⁹ A new list of subscribers was ordered at the end of November 1787.³⁰ By the end of the year, the London Society had made a significant start. In December 1787, before the Manchester meeting took place, *The Times* reported that 'an abolition of the slave trade is again a serious topic of conversation in most parts of the provincial towns not concerned in that inhuman traffic.'³¹ One such town was Derby where a series of anonymous letters demanding the abolition of the slave trade had appeared in the local press offering a wide number of illustrations and examples. The local theatre put on performances of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and, a few weeks later, when a farce was being performed, it was advertised that 'Between the Acts..., Mr. Grist will recite some Lines from the Task, a Poem, by William Cowper, Esq; On the Subject of the African Slave Trade.'³² The

²⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 24 May 1787; Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

²⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 13 November 1787.

²⁶ See the extracts in the *Derby Mercury*, 31 January 1788, and the review of the letter in *York Courant*, 5 February 1788.

²⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 27 August 1787.

²⁸ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

²⁹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 7 June 1787.

³⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 27 November 1787.

³¹ *The Times*, 17 December 1787.

³² *Derby Mercury*, 21 December 1787 - 7 February 1788.

public appetite for the slave trade was clearly great before Manchester petitioned. But the greatest burst of activity by the London Society was to come after the launch of the petition campaign.³³

When Clarkson arrived in Manchester at the end of October 1787, he was astonished by the progress the cause had made among the townspeople.³⁴ The small band of abolitionists, drawn from the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and the membership of the Society for Constitutional Information,³⁵ appear to have begun their work by using the *Manchester Chronicle* and the *Mercury*, both of which were owned by abolitionists.³⁶ Letters to the editors, often incorporating poetry, were particularly well-used. One of the first pieces of abolitionist propaganda used by the Manchester abolitionists was Roscoe's *The Wrongs of Africa*, which was followed by inevitable recourse to Cowper's *Charity*.³⁷ In October, 'F' wrote a letter to the *Mercury* which lauded the merits and intelligence of the 'African' and appealed for abolition. Around the same time, Thomas Cooper wrote a number of anonymous letters to the *Chronicle* which were subsequently reprinted as one of the earliest provincial abolitionist pamphlets.³⁸ The Manchester group also inserted numerous extracts: 'Remarks on the African Slave Trade' from James Foster's *Discourses on Natural Religion and Social Virtue*, a defence of natural rights based on Ferguson's *Moral Philosophy*, and the memorial of the Philadelphia Society to the Convention of the States.³⁹ It is interesting to note that extracts from these works had been collected and distributed by the Quaker sub-committee in the mid-1780s perhaps suggesting that the Quaker correspondents were heavily involved at this stage. The townspeople were also urged directly to assist the cause. In October, Rev. Thomas Seddon preached against the trade and encouraged contributions to the local committee and signatures for a putative petition to Parliament. A few days later, Clarkson was encouraged to give a sermon at the Collegiate Church.⁴⁰ By the beginning of November, subscriptions had been raised and were rapidly increasing: by mid-January 1788, the Society had 230 subscribers (of whom just under one quarter were women)

³³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 1 January 1788, 8 January 1788.

³⁴ Clarkson, *History*, I, pp. 415-417.

³⁵ For the SCI connections, see Walvin, 'The impact of slavery on British radical politics, 1787-1838,' in Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 292 (1977), pp. 344.

³⁶ Harrop and Wheeler wrote favourable editorials and offered their premises for the signing of petitions. Wheeler also produced Cooper's *Letters* as a pamphlet in 1787.

³⁷ *Manchester Mercury*, 25 September 1787, 23 October 1787.

³⁸ Thomas Cooper, *Letters on the Slave Trade: first published in Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle; and since re-printed with additions and alterations* (Manchester, 1787).

³⁹ *Manchester Mercury*, 23 October 1787, 1 December 1787, 16 October 1787.

⁴⁰ *Manchester Mercury*, 23 October 1787, 30 October 1787.

with a typical donation being one guinea.⁴¹ The Manchester abolitionists' success may be attributed to the extent of their appeal. From the first, general subscriptions were encouraged, including specific appeals to women.⁴² But also the use of the local press and sermons allowed the abolitionists to reach the general populace. Cooper's *Letters on the Slave Trade* was given away free, with the abolitionists covering the cost of printing and advertising from their subscriptions.⁴³ Clarkson's estimate of the extent of their efforts was well-founded.

The London abolitionists had aimed to educate public opinion in the horrors of the slave trade but they had not taken any official decision to initiate nationwide petitioning. Nevertheless, petitioning was one of the tactics advocated by the Abolition Society from the first. In May 1787, their first circular letter contained the hope that 'the general sense of the nation' would be roused and 'may be expressed by Petitions to Parliament.' Provincial supporters were also asked to approach their representatives 'in order to procure their assistance' and thus to help the Society in lobbying Parliamentary support.⁴⁴ Clarkson also tentatively broached petitioning with provincial supporters: by September 1788, Bridgwater, Monmouth, Bristol, Gloucester, Worcester, Shrewsbury and Chester were ready to raise petitions on the London Society's signal.⁴⁵ However, the London Society did not issue a call for the raising of petitions in 1787. Manchester would appear to have inaugurated the petition campaign of 1788 as Drescher believes. It was the first town to petition and appealed to others to follow in newspapers in England, Scotland and Ireland.⁴⁶ But Drescher's assertion that the Manchester Committee 'launched the petition campaign without consulting with the London Committee' is questionable.⁴⁷ Oldfield has shown that in the early weeks of December 1787, a number of letters passed between the Manchester abolitionists and the London Society. On 18th December, the London group knew that a public meeting was to be held in Manchester in the following days and at their next meeting received the resolutions raised there which included a statement approbating the work of the London abolitionists.⁴⁸ London was not ignorant of Manchester's efforts and there does appear to have been some consultation

⁴¹ *Manchester Mercury*, 6 November 1787 to 15 January 1788.

⁴² *Manchester Mercury*, 6 November 1787.

⁴³ *Manchester Mercury*, 4 December 1787; E. M. Hunt, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

⁴⁴ Abolition Society circular, begins: 'At a meeting held for the purpose of taking the slave trade into consideration...' (dated London, 22 May 1787). See also Oldfield, *op.cit.*, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 16 October 1787. Clarkson's letter was dated 3 September 1787.

⁴⁶ First report of Manchester society, printed in *Manchester Mercury*, 16 December 1788.

⁴⁷ Not least since the Manchester committee voted thanks to the London Society and sent one hundred guineas to its treasurer. *Manchester Mercury*, 1 January 1788.

⁴⁸ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 18 December 1787, 1 December 1788. See also Oldfield, *op.cit.*, pp. 47-48, although his guesses at the content of these letters is of dubious value.

but it is still the case that London followed rather than led on this matter. Furthermore, when Clarkson arrived in the town in October 1787, a petition was already being organised. Manchester's efforts were proceeding well before the letters of early December.⁴⁹

However, historians have not taken issue with Drescher's claim that the Manchester petition was also raised independently of the regional Quaker network. Considering the evidence already presented to suggest the pioneering work of the Quakers, this argument would seem highly unlikely. Firstly, it is reasonable to believe, as E. M. Hunt has argued, that the three prominent Quaker members of both the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and the local abolition committee, introduced Walker and Cooper to anti-slavery arguments.⁵⁰ Cooper was greatly influenced by the Quaker example, as he indicated in his letters to the *Manchester Chronicle* in October 1787. 'Subscriptions for this humane purpose have been confined to individuals of the respectable set of QUAKERS,' he noted. 'But why should the cause of humanity be supported by any particular description of the human race?'⁵¹ Cooper also remarked that 'the post of honour, in this most honourable conflict with Tyranny and Cruelty, has been seized by sectaries' and called on the Established Church to declare its assistance.⁵² More importantly, Cooper made it clear that a Quaker petition provided the immediate example and impetus to Manchester's petitioning activity. He had seen 'the' Quaker petition and now urged all denominations to join together to petition against the traffic.⁵³ What this petition was is unclear: it may have been the 1783 petition, or a local petition which may have been dropped in favour of a non-sectarian petition. The only Quaker petition known to have existed at this time was that which the Quaker sub-committee had toyed with since February 1787 and had held in abeyance from October awaiting 'the proper juncture.' Manchester's petition of December 1787 provided those favourable circumstances and the Quaker sub-committee resolved to petition on 25th January 1788 under the influence of Dillwyn, Barclay, Elliot and Lloyd, all members of the London Society.⁵⁴ Although the Manchester radicals were well-accustomed to petitioning, especially as an interested

⁴⁹ Clarkson, *History*, I, chapter XIX, pp. 415-440 includes details Clarkson's visit; *Manchester Mercury*, 23 October 1787.

⁵⁰ E. M. Hunt, *op.cit.*, and 'North of England Agitation for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1780-1800,' MA Thesis, University of Manchester (1959). The aforementioned article is a version of chapter 3 of Hunt's 1959 thesis.

⁵¹ Cooper, *Letters on the Slave Trade*, p. 26.

⁵² Cooper, *ibid.* He was also heavily influenced by Wesley's *Thoughts on Slavery*.

⁵³ Cooper, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ MSS 'Minute Book of the Meeting for Sufferings Committee on the Slave Trade, 1783-1792' (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Quaker Committee, 1783-1792'), Society of Friends Library, London: 26 February 1787, and 11 May 1787 to 25 January 1788.

mercantile lobby, they saw Quaker exertions as the prototype for their actions. While Drescher is right to argue that 'Manchester rather than the Quaker religious network pushed Britain across the psychological threshold into the abolitionist era,'⁵⁵ it was the Quaker religious network which pushed Manchester into abolitionism. Manchester's efforts did not emerge in a vacuum.

Nevertheless, we can see how it was the Manchester example which energised the slowly awakening abolitionist network. When the Manchester Society petitioned in 1787, their resolutions, appeals for other petitions, and the scale of their exertions were significant departures for the campaign as a whole. Most importantly, the Manchester Society asked that petitions be raised 'from the people at large.'⁵⁶ Manchester provided a precedent for other petitions.⁵⁷ The 'breadth of Manchester's petition,' to which Drescher attributes its impact,⁵⁸ was reflected in its vast subscription (in excess of £300) and one month later by the number of signatures raised. Clarkson sent copies of the Manchester resolutions to provincial supporters who required assistance with formulating their petition.⁵⁹ *The Times* also noted Manchester's pre-eminence in the petition campaign.⁶⁰ Moreover, as Drescher has pointed out, the Manchester petition reflected a sea-change in public opinion. Before the Manchester meeting, journalists in the capital expected the north of England to support the continuance of the slave trade. The Manchester petition ended this expectation and, following the receipt of numerous other petitions from the north of England, allowed the abolitionists to argue that even areas wedded to the slave trade could appreciate its injustices.⁶¹ Though well aware of the city's reliance on slavery, the Manchester committee remained 'too jealous of that Reputation which all honest men ought to desire...'⁶² The disinterested appeal of Manchester was reinforced by a similar petition from Bristol which was signed by several people who had been involved in the slave trade.⁶³ As a prototype, the Manchester petition suggested not only the extent of abolitionist support but the utter inhumanity of the slave trade.

Manchester's efforts had the effect of spurring the central committee to greater exertions. On the 1st January 1788, 5,000 additional copies of Clarkson's *Summary*

⁵⁵ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 71.

⁵⁶ *Manchester Mercury*, 1 January 1788.

⁵⁷ 'The Spirit of Example seems to have caught the inhabitants of this Kingdom in general.' *Derby Mercury*, 24 January 1788.

⁵⁸ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

⁵⁹ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 12 January 1788.

⁶¹ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 71, and especially p. 211 *fn* 19.

⁶² *Manchester Mercury*, 1 January 1788.

⁶³ *The Times*, 8 March 1788.

View were ordered and two MPs were elected to the committee.⁶⁴ By their next meeting, 2,000 copies of Clarkson's *Essay* and a further 2,000 copies of the Dean of Middleham's letter were ordered 'without delay.' The increase in business necessitated the expansion of the committee which rose to thirty members.⁶⁵ The Committee's largest initial print-run of any tract up to that date came were 10,000 copies of the Society's first report which included the call for petitions.⁶⁶ The London Society also made efforts to encourage petitioning in specific areas. Rev. Wyvill, founder of the Yorkshire Association, was asked to raise a petition from Yorkshire while the Mayor of those towns which had not petitioned were sent a copy of the Society's first report. Petition were also solicited from Glasgow: three in favour of abolition were presented during the 1788 campaign.⁶⁷ The response from the country was so great that a sub-committee was formed to reply to urgent letters between committee meetings.⁶⁸

It also appears that the Manchester abolitionists alerted London to the use of the popular press. The Manchester resolutions were printed 'in such a manner as shall insure their Circulation throughout the Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland.'⁶⁹ To this end, they employed William Taylor, a newspapers agent: in total, almost £130 was spent by the committee on this task alone.⁷⁰ While Oldfield suggests that the London abolitionists showed an 'enlightened' attitude to advertising,⁷¹ they were notably quiet in their use of the press in the seven months preceding Manchester's resolutions. Even in September 1788, Ramsay observed that 'they seem to be afraid of appearing in a News paper.'⁷² Indeed, there is little evidence that the London Committee appreciated the use of provincial newspapers before Manchester set the precedent. While the Quakers had inserted extracts and short tracts in the newspapers, there are no indications within the minute books of the London Society that this tactic had been suggested.⁷³ The use of the provincial press was, in fact, something of a novelty: John Barton, the London Quaker and member of the Society, noted that

⁶⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 1 January 1788.

⁶⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 8 January 1788.

⁶⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 15 January 1788. A further 5,000 were ordered on 29 January 1788.

⁶⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 22 January 1788; *House of Commons Journals*, 21 February 1788, 9 April 1788, 15 May 1788.

⁶⁸ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 18 December 1787.

⁶⁹ *Manchester Mercury*, 1 January 1788.

⁷⁰ *Manchester Mercury*, 16 December 1788; E. M. Hunt also refers to this in 'The Anti-Slave Trade Agitation in Manchester,' p. 54.

⁷¹ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

⁷² Thompson-Clarkson collection, three volumes, in Society of Friends Library, London. Vol. III: Letter from James Ramsay to James Phillips, 6 September 1788.

⁷³ Local newspapers, however, may have taken it upon themselves to reprint or report the Society's first circular letter.

Manchester's use of the public advertisements would be 'of great value.'⁷⁴ The first evidence of the use of the provincial press by London came two weeks *after* Manchester had set the precedent when the London Society decided to print its first report in the London and country newspapers.⁷⁵ Furthermore, William Taylor, Manchester's newspaper agent, was also used by the London Society from 1791 when they put their report in the Scottish and Irish newspapers.⁷⁶ Although Oldfield is correct to assert that Manchester 'could never compete with London in terms of resources, access to Parliament or regional contacts,' it was these deficiencies which account for Manchester's impact. Rather than relying on a close network of correspondents, the Manchester group had to use the provincial press. By so doing, they issued the widest abolitionist appeal to that date.⁷⁷

Another novelty was the Manchester group's decision to contact the Mayor or chief magistrate 'of every principal Town throughout Great Britain' and ask for their co-operation in raising similar petitions.⁷⁸ The first report of the Manchester Society shows that over fifty pounds was spent on sending these circular letters.⁷⁹ This was a tactic as yet untried by the London Society, although Mayors and Sheriffs had undoubtedly been contacted as prominent individuals and the Quaker sub-committee had used this tactic before in 1784-85.⁸⁰ It would appear that this endeavour immediately influenced some areas. The Corporation of the City of York, for example, met 24th January to organise a petition from the Mayor and 'Commonality,'⁸¹ by which time the Manchester resolutions had been recorded in the *York Courant*, but the first report of the London Committee, dated 25th January 1788, had yet to be circulated. Manchester's appeal may therefore have had direct results.⁸² More importantly, the tactic was adopted by the London Society. At the end of January 1788, it was resolved that the Mayors of those towns which had *not then* petitioned should be contacted and sent a copy of the Abolition Society's first report.

⁷⁴ Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Public Library, 920 ROS. No. 239: J. Barton to William Roscoe, 21 January 1788. In the same letter, Barton asks Roscoe to found a society in Liverpool on the grounds that Manchester had recently done so with success.

⁷⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 15 January 1788.

⁷⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III (BM Add. MSS 21,256): 26 April 1791, 2 August 1791.

⁷⁷ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 49. As William Taylor was used by Manchester and London for exactly the same purpose, resources were clearly less of an issue than Oldfield supposes.

⁷⁸ *Manchester Mercury*, 1 January 1788.

⁷⁹ *Manchester Mercury*, 16 December 1788. This figure does not include printing costs.

⁸⁰ MSS Minutes of Quaker Committee, 1783-1792: entries from December 1784.

⁸¹ *York Courant*, 5 February 1788; City of York Archives, MSS City of York House Book, 1780-92, Vol. 45, pp. 283-284.

⁸² The Manchester resolutions were printed in the *York Courant*, 15 January 1788 but the London report was only printed on 12 February 1788. The London Society's report was dated both 15 January 1788 and 25 January 1788. It only appeared in *The Times* in London on 2 February 1788.

The Mayors of Maidstone and Coventry contacted the London Society directly.⁸³ In the following years, contacting provincial officers became a regular tactic.⁸⁴

The Manchester abolitionists undoubtedly deserves centre stage for raising the first inhabitants anti-slavery petition and for encouraging the same. But it is clear that their efforts were not produced in a vacuum nor that they worked independently of the London Society or the Society of Friends. In a sense, the debate over Manchester's importance has been distorted by focusing attention on the decision to petition. The work of Manchester's abolitionists was equally significant in terms of their tactics, methods and the nature of their appeals. While the London Society was not reluctant to encourage petitioning, it did not issue an appeal for petitions until after the Manchester committee had printed their resolutions throughout the country. Oldfield's assertion that 'the London Committee was in control of the [petitioning] campaign and able to dictate its timing and pace' seems greatly exaggerated.⁸⁵ Moreover, the Manchester abolitionists' use of the press, their letters to official dignitaries and their appeal for petitions based on the widest franchise ran ahead of efforts in London. Furthermore, it seems that the example of the Manchester committee predisposed the London group to establishing a web of permanent committees across the country.⁸⁶ Manchester energised both the emerging network of abolitionist sympathisers and the London Society to renewed exertions.

THE PETITIONS OF 1788

The abolitionist petitions of 1788 were remarkable by contemporary standards. Drescher has calculated that some two hundred petitions were received by the Commons in 1788, over half of which appealed for the abolition of the slave trade.⁸⁷ Petitions in favour of abolition were raised in ninety-three towns, boroughs and counties, some of which sent more than one petition (hence the disparity between the number of places petitioning and the number of petitions). These places and the types of petitions sent indicate the nature of the early successes of the campaign.

⁸³ Clarkson, *History*, I, p. 467.

⁸⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 22 January 1788.

⁸⁵ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

⁸⁶ Roscoe papers, No. 239: John Barton to William Roscoe, 21 January 1788. Barton referred explicitly to the example set by the Manchester committee.

⁸⁷ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

The most obvious characteristic of the 1788 petitions was the lack of unity in their requests. The petitioners of Wakefield, for example, asked for ‘the Regulation, and, in due time, the Abolition of the SLAVE TRADE.’⁸⁸ Significantly, they did not renew their petition in 1792 after some degree of regulation, Dolben’s bill, had been enacted. The petition from the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council of London, however, asked merely that ‘an impartial and Immediate Enquiry’ into the trade be established.⁸⁹ Others groups clearly extended their appeal to include slavery. The *Sheffield Register*, in advertising the town’s petition, boldly stated that ‘the present time, when the rights of mankind are better defined and understood than at any former period, is the æra of their [the slaves] emancipation...’⁹⁰ It was both the generality of the London Society’s pamphlets and the counter-propaganda of the West Indies which led to this confusion. The London abolitionists had asked their Philadelphia counterparts to send information about slavery: ‘we are particularly desirous of knowing what consequences have resulted to Plantations where the manumission of Slaves has already taken place.’⁹¹ As late as January 1788, the committee accepted and printed a tract by Archbishop Paley on the propriety of manumitting slaves.⁹² The *Derby Mercury*, like other provincial newspapers, could legitimately claim that ‘the main Scope of the [Abolition Society] is at once to annihilate the Slave-Trade, and to place those that are in Bondage on the firmer Footing of *hired Servants*.’⁹³ By the beginning of March 1788, the Abolition Society had realised that their aims needed clarifying.⁹⁴ The Society also became more critical of the type of propaganda it endorsed and disseminated: a manuscript submitted at this time was rejected on the grounds that it extended ‘beyond the Views of this Society.’⁹⁵ In their second report, the Abolition Society stated that ‘however acceptable a temperate and gradual abolition of slavery might be to the wishes of individuals it never formed any part of the plan of this society,’ a fact which they had thought it necessary to ‘disclaim by publick [*sic*] advertisement.’⁹⁶

The type of petitions received is also revealing. In total, a third of the 1788 petitions originated with corporations or local government officials. Seven or eight of these bodies petitioned alone but another twenty-five did so in conjunction with other groups such as the clergy, ‘principal inhabitants’ or ‘commonalty.’ As this represents

⁸⁸ *York Courant*, 4 March 1788.

⁸⁹ *House of Commons Journals*, 4 February 1788.

⁹⁰ *Sheffield Register*, 19 January 1788.

⁹¹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 17 July 1787.

⁹² MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 29 January 1788.

⁹³ *Derby Mercury*, 24 January 1788; *Sheffield Register*, 26 January 1788.

⁹⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II (BM Add. MSS 21,255): 5 March 1788.

⁹⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 18 March 1788.

⁹⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 12 August 1788. Second report of the Society.

a significant proportion of the overall returns, it suggests that the direct efforts of the Manchester and London committees to encourage mayors and Justices of the Peace to petition was perhaps successful. The large number of corporations who petitioned with the inhabitants - one quarter of all the petitions - further suggests that Manchester's appeal for a wide franchise for signatures may have been acted upon. It also appears that those corporations which petitioned alone inspired other sympathisers in the town who had been excluded to raise their own appeals. In York, the corporation's decision to petition alone led to an appeal from the precentor of the Minster for an inhabitants' petition.⁹⁷

Only twenty four towns and boroughs sent inhabitants petitions. However, the identity of these towns is striking. Birmingham, Bolton, Bradford, Chesterfield, Coventry, Leeds, Nottingham, Rotherham, Sheffield, Wakefield and Warrington, had strong artisan and working-class cultures and were at the forefront of Britain's industrial revolution. Their decision to petition as 'inhabitants' perhaps reflects the breadth of local support for the cause. Of course, the most notable feature of these petitions was the preponderance of support from the north of England. Drescher has observed that a third came from the newly industrialised areas north of the Severn, although significant clusters also existed between Bedford and Norwich and the triangle marked by Bristol, Plymouth and Southampton.⁹⁸ Two-thirds of inhabitants' petitions came from the north of England. In the Abolition Society's first report, issued amid the early receipt of petitions, the London abolitionists credited 'the spirited exertions of Manchester, Birmingham and other principal Manufacturing Towns.'⁹⁹ When all the petitions were in, this impression was confirmed. The distribution of the London Society's second report, in August 1788, is further illustrative of this northern bias. The towns most heavily represented were in the area identified by Drescher north of the Severn: Manchester, Birmingham, York, Nottingham, Northampton, Leeds, Sheffield and Hull. His other pockets of abolitionist activity, Bristol, Norwich, Plymouth and Exeter, were similarly well represented.¹⁰⁰

Only eleven counties petitioned in 1788, all of them in England. In part this reflects the complexity of organising county petitions. The Mayor and local dignitaries had to agree to a petition and then sheets had to be transmitted to several towns for signature. The process was extremely time-consuming: the Nottinghamshire petition took over

⁹⁷ The same was true in Ripon. *House of Commons Journal*, 7 February 1788, 12 February 1788.

⁹⁸ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

⁹⁹ First report of the Abolition Society in MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 15 January 1788.

¹⁰⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 26 August 1788.

three months to be signed and completed,¹⁰¹ while the average town or borough petition could be raised, signed and presented to the Commons within one month. The county petition from York was raised too late for the session and had to be presented in February 1789.¹⁰² Furthermore, county petitions may have dissuaded local supporters from raising petitions from individual towns locally. Of the ten counties which sent petitions only three also sent petitions from their county towns. Indeed, those counties which petitioned sent fewer towns petitions than those counties which did not (with the exception of the belated petition from Yorkshire). The London Society was alert to a problematic relationship between the two types of petitions but misinterpreted the signs. In 1792, they told correspondents that 'Petitions from Towns will not render those from Counties unnecessary; both are desirable, and we think that those from Towns will greatly promote those from Counties.'¹⁰³

There was also a noticeable lack of petitions from Scotland and Wales. This was partly a result of the poor state of communications in the countries but also reflects the lack of attention paid to these two areas by the London Society. Only one Scottish name was included in the original list of the Society ('P. Colquhoun, Glasgow' - an empty space was left for a contact in Edinburgh) and only three Welsh names were included.¹⁰⁴ This short-coming may reflect the London Society's reliance on the Quaker network: the Society of Friends had few members in Scotland and Wales. When Wales was integrated into the nationwide campaign it was done so by a Quaker, Joseph Price of Neath Abbey, who founded an anti-slavery society in 1823.¹⁰⁵ Both countries were to be better represented in the 1792 campaign as a result of the London-sponsored tours of William Dickson in Scotland and Joseph Plymley in mid-Wales. Indeed, the Scottish case seems to confirm the impression that Manchester's circular appeal was successful where the London Society (and the Quakers before them) had created a climate of opinion favourable to abolition. Since the London group had all but ignored Scotland and Wales, this may explain why Manchester's resolutions fell on deaf ears.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

¹⁰² *House of Commons Journals*, 5 February 1789. The petition was raised on 10 July 1788.

¹⁰³ Abolition Society circular, dated 23 January 1792.

¹⁰⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 20 July 1787.

¹⁰⁵ Gwynne E. Owen, 'Welsh Anti-Slavery Sentiments, 1790-1865: a survey of public opinion', MA thesis, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (1964). Price was 'the principal organiser of anti-slavery meetings in South Wales,' p. 33.

¹⁰⁶ Drescher's note that the Manchester committee limited their appeal to England is incorrect (*Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 77) as their first report states that their resolutions were printed in every newspaper in England, Scotland and Ireland. *Manchester Mercury*, 14 December 1788.

The petitions from Scotland, with few exceptions, were raised through the networks of the Scots presbyteries. Each of the Scottish towns which petitioned (for none were raised in boroughs or counties) sent one petition from the presbytery. It would appear that these religious petitions were co-ordinated by the sect: all were received from April 1788, albeit too late to have an effect on the deliberations in Parliament. The *House of Commons Journals* do not indicate that their appeals were different from each other. This religious network allowed abolitionism to penetrate Scotland where the population was less densely concentrated and there had been little abolitionist activity: the Presbyterian influence spread as far north as the Orkney Islands where the presbytery of Kirkwall raised and sent a petition to Parliament. The capacity of religious petitions to extend the geography of abolitionism would be illustrated more conclusively with the explosion of congregational petitioning of the early 1830s.¹⁰⁷

The key to the distribution of the 1788 petitions was the network of country correspondents. The London Society's minutes for the first three months of 1788 show that many of those who corresponded or sent petitions for approval had been named in the list of July 1787. Moreover, the lack of correspondents in Scotland and Wales had contributed to the lack of petitions from these countries. Where correspondents had been found, pamphlets had been distributed, the press alerted, and an awareness of the question raised. When petitions were called for, these individuals organised pamphlets and requisitions themselves. The petitions of 1788 were a relatively closed affair, conducted in the main by men in frequent contact with the London Society.¹⁰⁸

Although the number and ubiquity of the petitions of 1788 was unprecedented, their actual influence on the debate in Parliament was rapidly sapped. On 11th February, a Privy Council investigation into the slave trade was ordered. While it was probably appointed in response to the signs of enraged public opinion, by taking the debate within the House the effect of public pressure was minimised. The London Society immediately halted all efforts to encourage public mobilisation. On the day after the Council was appointed, the London Committee decided to hold on to the Bishop of Peterborough's *Thoughts on the means of Abolishing the Slave Trade in Great Britain and our West India Colonies* 'till a convenient time offers of producing it to the public.'¹⁰⁹ In the next two months, little was done to maintain the tempo of activity in the country. Instead, all efforts were transferred to the forthcoming investigations. On 16th February, the London Committee organised a sub-committee to arrange

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 10.

¹⁰⁸ See chapter 3.

¹⁰⁹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 12 February 1788.

evidenced to be presented before the Privy Council at Wilberforce's request. Richard Phillips was quickly employed as a solicitor to organise the evidence and to consider the propriety of obtaining further counsel.¹¹⁰

The establishment of the Privy Council investigations caused concern among abolitionists in London and throughout the country. In Manchester, the local committee sent numerous letters to London and later dispatched Walker and Cooper to the metropolis as delegates. Wilberforce's complicity in the establishment of the Privy Council investigations did not go unnoticed: Charles James Fox put Wilberforce's decision down to 'a want of judgement scarcely credible.'¹¹¹ In fact, Wilberforce's decision was based on sound political reasoning, even if it jarred with the popular protest from without. We must not forget the novelty of the abolitionists' revelations. Wilberforce was confident that the Privy Council would condemn the slave trade and that a vast quantity of factual evidence would secure the passage of legislation. However, there still remained an unprecedented number of petitions in the Commons which had not been used effectively in the abolition's favour.¹¹² The Manchester delegates were not alone in their dismay. By early April, the London Committee were anxious that 'some notice should be taken in the lower house of the numerous petitions which [had] been presented there.'¹¹³ With Wilberforce incapacitated by a sudden illness, the task fell to Pitt who considered himself personally pledged to Wilberforce. A few days before Pitt's motion, the London Society organised a sub-committee of eight people, including Walker and Cooper from Manchester, to wait on MPs.¹¹⁴ On 9th May, despite West Indian opposition, the Commons voted to consider the slave trade early in the next session.

However, two weeks later, Sir William Dolben seized the initiative and introduced his own motion for regulating the slave trade. Dolben, horrified by a personal inspection of a slave ship in dock, proposed to limit the number of slaves who could be legally transported in proportion to the ship's tonnage.¹¹⁵ The abolitionists, however, shied away from the measure and quickly made it clear that the bill 'did not aim at the point to which the attention of the Society has been invariably directed.'¹¹⁶ Regulation

¹¹⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 16 February 1788, 26 February 1788.

¹¹¹ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 43. He also imputed that Wilberforce might betray the cause.

¹¹² Only fourteen petitions had been presented by the time that the Privy Council investigation was ordered. *House of Commons Journals*, 1788, entries to 15 May 1788.

¹¹³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 8 April 1788.

¹¹⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 6 May 1788.

¹¹⁵ Anstey, *op.cit.*, pp. 269-70.

¹¹⁶ Beaufoy, *Speech of Mr. Beaufoy, Tuesday, 18th June 1788, in the Committee of the Whole House, on a bill for regulating the conveyance of negroes* (1789). Quotation from Granville Sharp's introduction.

‘might be construed into acknowledgement of the Principle that the Trade was in itself just but had been abused.’¹¹⁷ Maintaining the moral high-ground was imperative: Ramsay replied to those who favoured regulation over abolition by arguing simply ‘Regulate murder as you please, it still remains murder.’¹¹⁸ But, in practical terms, some abolitionists felt that Dolben’s motion could redirect, or even end, popular mobilisation. The Liverpool abolitionist, Dr. James Currie wrote ‘I am very sorry that this motion is made, because it will tend to divert into channels that stream of virtuous enthusiasm, whose undivided strength might have swept the whole fabric of this villainous traffic from the surface of the earth.’¹¹⁹ His fears, though exaggerated, may have been valid - certainly, the London abolitionists appears to have felt the need to counter such an eventuality. In 1789, Clarkson wrote a pamphlet which described the ‘comparative efficiency’ of regulation and abolition.¹²⁰ In July of the same year, the report of the London Society also noted that regulation was an insufficient remedy for the enormity of the evil and that ‘nothing short of total abolition’ would now be acceptable.¹²¹ Dolben’s bill probably suggested to the West Indians that conceding gradual regulation was more effective than risking open opposition. This also pushed the abolitionists towards defending their moral principle. One anonymous Liverpool correspondent, writing to Clarkson, noted that

‘if the planters should look for *compensation* there will be two irresistible claims upon them: For Africa may certainly demand a compensation for the miseries it has experienced on their account; and the numerous widows and orphans of seamen destroyed in the slave-trade may call upon them for maintenance and support.’¹²²

Nevertheless, the successful passage of Dolben’s bill could be taken by the abolitionists to mean that the inhumanity of the slave trade had been officially recognised.

PARLIAMENTARY INVESTIGATIONS

¹¹⁷ Matthews MSS: 27 March 1788, 6 June 1788, quoted in Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

¹¹⁸ James Ramsay, *Objections to the Abolition of the Slave Trade, with answers* (1788), p. 79.

¹¹⁹ J. Currie to Miss Cropper, 23 May 1788, printed in *Life of James Currie*, Volume II, appendix.

¹²⁰ Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Comparative Efficiency of Regulation or Abolition, as applied to the Slave Trade* (1789). Introduction is dated 4th June 1789.

¹²¹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II, 28 July 1789, 25 August 1789.

¹²² Clarkson, *Essay on the Comparative Efficiency* (1789), p. vii.

With Parliament in recess until October, the London Society was able to take stock of its achievements and to consolidate its successes. In its first year, the Society printed 76,758 copies of publications (around 50,000 were pamphlets, those remaining were copies of the first and second reports) and over 6,000 circulars of various kinds including the subscription lists of the Society.¹²³ These were issued 'not at random, but judiciously, and through respectable channels.'¹²⁴ Through these exertions, and the organisation of petitions, several temporary committees had been formed throughout the country. In mid-June 1788, the London Society resolved to organise permanent committees to aid their design and to provide financial assistance. The cost of publications up to August 1788 was in excess of £1,100 while postage alone added a further £100.¹²⁵ Clarkson's plan was to form a committee 'at least in one place in each county on the plan of that of Nottingham' and to ask these neighbouring societies to rule the areas between them and thus to organise blanket coverage of the country. Branch societies were asked to raise subscriptions and petitions when required but also to canvass their area for individuals of good character who could give evidence to the Parliamentary select committee of conditions on the coast of Africa or in the West Indies.¹²⁶ Clarkson was assisted from London by George Harrison, Philip Samson, Major Cartwright and five others. Wilberforce's warned the committee against 'giving any possible occasion of offence to the Legislature by forced or unnecessary Association,' and it was perhaps for this reason that Cartwright, the great radical agitator, was dropped from the sub-committee from this time.¹²⁷

A few weeks later, Clarkson set off on his tour but was apparently unsuccessful. Unspecified 'difficulties' occurred when Clarkson attempted to excite public opinion. The drain on time and money was also deemed to be too exacting on the Society's resources. Moreover, Wilberforce had become more cautious, both about the establishment of 'unnecessary associations' and public displays of abolitionism in general, and had begun to influence the committee's decisions in this way.¹²⁸ It would therefore appear that, for a while, the Committee regarded the creation of formalised associations nationwide as being of dubious political value. Instead, they adopted a

¹²³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 12 August 1788. Report of the finances.

¹²⁴ Clarkson, *History*, I, p. 491.

¹²⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 12 August 1788.

¹²⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 10 June 1788.

¹²⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 10 June 1788 to 29 July 1788. Wilberforce's letter was received on 8 July 1788. Cartwright was not listed on 29 July 1788. The fact that Cartwright was originally a member perhaps explains the choice of Nottingham as the prototype committee. These entries also contain the first mention of attempts to adopt a nationwide network of auxiliary societies, although several had already been founded for the purpose of raising subscriptions and petitions during 1787.

¹²⁸ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 26 August 1788; Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 49. Wilberforce cautioned the abolitionists against the public meeting two weeks earlier.

different strategy and wrote only to areas where country committees could be 'at all useful.' They also decided to bring existing committees into line by sending them 'printed copies of the Propositions relative to the formulation of such committees.'¹²⁹ Nevertheless, Clarkson's original plan was applied on a limited scale along the south-west coast during September and October 1788. Clarkson found committees already established in Poole and Exeter and may have assisted a pre-existing core of active supporters in Plymouth in the formation of their branch society which first met in November.¹³⁰ The very presence of Clarkson at this time served to revive interest in the cause. At Exeter, a general meeting of subscribers was arranged for 1st November at which Clarkson spoke.¹³¹

Under financial constraints, the London Society asked local committees to assist in the accumulation of evidence. This particular duty is one which historians have frequently overlooked yet it shows how provincial abolitionists could be of great practical value to the Abolition Society during a period of relative inactivity. Some supporters through their employment were able to obtain evidence for presentation before the Privy Council and subsequent select committees. William Rathbone, as a prominent Liverpool ship-builder and trader, was able to obtain the muster rolls of ships. The muster rolls for Bristol and London may also have been obtained through similar contacts. Alexander Alison, the secretary of the Edinburgh Society, was an excise officer: in April 1789, he supplied the London Society with 'three papers of evidence' to be put before the select committee.¹³² During Clarkson's first tour, he was also introduced, by local supporters, to a number of eye-witnesses whose evidence provided the basis for his essay on the impolicy of slavery. Through the Bristol committee he met Alexander Falconbridge, the former slave-ship surgeon who provided evidence before the Privy Council and later became an agent in Africa for the Sierra Leone company.¹³³ Following the appointment of the Commons investigation at the end of May 1789, country correspondents were once more asked 'to improve all favourable opportunities of enlarging the quantum of Evidence and of assisting the influence of Humanity.'¹³⁴ Local abolitionists were called on to locate witnesses for cross-examination before these and subsequent hearings. Clarkson compiled a list of 145 questions to assist provincial abolitionists in this work. Witnesses recommended by country correspondents were examined before the Privy

¹²⁹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 26 August 1788.

¹³⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 26 August 1788. Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p99.

¹³¹ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

¹³² MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 28 April 1789.

¹³³ Clarkson, *History*, I, p. 348, 378.

¹³⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 28 July 1789, 25 August 1789.

Council in its hearings from November 1788 along with those organised by Clarkson and Wilberforce.¹³⁵

The role played by provincial abolitionists in accumulating evidence against the slave trade illustrates how far contact with the slave trade and slavery permeated British society. Katherine Plymley recorded that her brother found an apothecary at Poole who had been on the coast of Africa while she herself lamented the ‘execrable consequence!’ that a member of the clergy in the neighbourhood owned an estate in the West Indies.¹³⁶ At public meetings and through the newspapers, provincial abolitionists were educated in the horrors of slavery not only by official propaganda but by sympathetic eye-witnesses who had been present in the West Indies, Africa or served on slave ships. At the beginning of November 1788, sympathisers in Exeter heard the testimony of Robert Paul junior, a young man who had spent fifteen months in the trade.¹³⁷ In Sheffield, the local committee thanked one man who attended their public meeting for the evidence with which he had provided them.¹³⁸ ‘A respectable Merchant once engaged in the Traffic’ provided the *York Courant* with details of the number of slaves purchased each year on the West Coast of Africa.¹³⁹ Edward Rushton, the Liverpool abolitionist, had served his apprenticeship on a slave ship.¹⁴⁰ These connections were so common that they featured in a West Indian pastiche: one labourer was said to have been convinced of the horrors of slavery by ‘a Parson who was on a visit to Nottingham, and who had been Chaplain to a Regiment in Jamaica.’¹⁴¹

Of course, gathering evidence could be a covert operation. The Plymleys, for example, were able to obtain a letter from a planter in Jamaica to his father in Shropshire which stated that the example of St. Domingo had not turned British slaves to rebellion:

‘This extract is the more valuable as the writer cou’d not have the least idea it wou’d be seen by anybody but his Father, who is a very quiet old man, lives quite retired & is not of an age, disposition or situation to take a part in public questions. My Uncle being a very kind friend to him he often shares him his son’s letters & thro’ him my Br. [brother] got the extract which he immediately transmitted to Mr. Clarkson & desired him to show it to Mr. Wilberforce.’¹⁴²

¹³⁵ Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 12; Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

¹³⁶ MSS Corbett of Longnor Papers, Diaries of Katherine Plymley, Ref. 1066, held at Shropshire Record Office, Shrewsbury (hereafter cited as Plymley diaries): Books 6 and 7.

¹³⁷ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

¹³⁸ *Sheffield Register*, 19 January 1788.

¹³⁹ *York Courant*, 5 August 1788.

¹⁴⁰ William Shepherd, *Life of Edward Rushton* (Liverpool, 1824).

¹⁴¹ *York Courant*, 17 April 1792.

¹⁴² MSS Plymley Diaries, Book 7.

As in this case, local researches could locate sources of great value to the national campaign, perhaps none more so than the Plymouth abolitionists who ‘contributed greatly to impress the public in favour of [the] cause’ by commissioning an engraving of a crammed slave ship.¹⁴³ Their plan consisted of the lower deck of an African slave ship of 297 tons which contained slaves in a proportion greater than one to a ton. In December 1788, the local committee printed 1,500 copies for local circulation but also sent the plan to London.¹⁴⁴ In April, the Abolition Society began issuing copies of the print in a different form, one which had been ‘improved’ by the London Committee in the first half of 1789.¹⁴⁵ The new print, now that of the *Brookes* of Liverpool, was an amalgam of sources. To the original lower deck was added another deck and side elevations. The actual measurements of the ship were provided by Captain Parrey of the Royal Navy and then the dimensions of people within were calculated.¹⁴⁶ While the wording drew from the original Plymouth appeal, that too was changed. At first this new print appears to have incurred the displeasure of William Elford, the chairman of the Plymouth group, who evidently disagreed with James Phillips on the amendments made.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the print had a significant impact. When the print was completed, it was sent immediately to members of both Houses of Parliament, shortly before Dolben’s motion, and those provincial correspondents recommended by the committee for distribution.¹⁴⁸ On tour in Scotland in the early months of 1792, William Dickson wrote from Edinburgh: ‘The slave ships have been put up in the Banks, Public offices, Coffee house &c. here, with an excellent effect. Our cause gains ground.’¹⁴⁹ Clarkson frequently observed the print, framed and hung on the walls of Quaker homes, and indicated that it was one of the few prints he ever saw Friends own.¹⁵⁰ The print was later folded and stitched into Clarkson’s *History*. The extensive use still made of the *Brookes* print today is testimony to the enduring power and value of the original image.

The Privy Council’s hearings resumed in November 1788 but, as a consequence of the King’s illness over the winter months, the business of the slave trade’s abolition and

¹⁴³ Clarkson, *History*, Vol. II, p. 29.

¹⁴⁴ This print is published in Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 164. See also pp. 163-166 for Oldfield’s observations.

¹⁴⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 21 April 1789.

¹⁴⁶ Clarkson, *History*, Vol. II, pp. 112-114.

¹⁴⁷ Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. II: Letter from William Elford, Plymouth to James Phillips, 18 March 1789.

¹⁴⁸ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 21 April 1789.

¹⁴⁹ Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. II: Letter from William Dickson, Edinburgh to James Phillips, 14 January 1792. Katherine Plymley noted that the Edinburgh committee ‘paste up a plan of a Slave Ship wherever they think it will be seen by many.’ MSS Plymley Diaries, book 4.

¹⁵⁰ Clarkson, *A Portraiture of Quakerism* (1806), pp. 208-210.

the Council's investigations were quickly suspended. In the meantime, the London Society appealed for subscriptions through the press and raised £400 in six weeks. In February, they began to move once more on the debate in Parliament. A sub-committee was appointed to contact the Peers and consider the propriety of employing council in the House of Lords, perhaps to move the hearings along. At the same time, they contacted Wilberforce to press on him the necessity of 'bringing on the Business of the Slave Trade' in the Commons during the next session.¹⁵¹ Their efforts quickly paid off: Wilberforce announced that he was in complete agreement with the committee while the Earl of Stanhope revealed himself to be a hearty friend of the cause and agreed to organise a committee in the Lords for the speedy passage of the business.¹⁵² On 10 March 1789, the London Society decided to inform their provincial correspondents that the slave trade question was to be raised in Parliament soon and that they were urgently required to lobby their MPs to attend the discussions. In the next few weeks, they received responses from Norwich, Hull, Manchester, Edinburgh and Chesterfield.¹⁵³

Wilberforce's motion was also the signal for renewed West Indian activity. In April, the London Society felt it necessary to appoint a sub-committee to counter West Indian accusations.¹⁵⁴ Between 20th April and 20th May, the Commons received thirty two petitions from anti-abolitionist groups - only one petition was received in favour of abolition, that of 769 freemen of the corporation of Cutlers in Hallamshire.¹⁵⁵ Faced with the superior timing of pro-slavery petitions, the abolitionists were keen to ensure that their petitions of 1788 had an impact albeit one year later. In advance of the discussion in the Commons on 21 May 1789, the London Society produced a tract which contained the substance of these petitions and distributed it to every MP.¹⁵⁶ They also lobbied, distributed copperplate copies of the *Brookes* print, and printed the substance of the first debate for immediate circulation. The West Indians, however, proved to be considerably more adept at manipulating Parliament than the abolitionists: they inundated Parliament with petitions on the day before the debate. On 21st May 1789, the West Indians insisted that the Privy Council report, which had been introduced by Pitt at the end of April, was insufficient and demanded that the Commons hear its own evidence. This time, Wilberforce resisted the call for

¹⁵¹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 24 February 1789.

¹⁵² The sub-committee proceeded to lobby the members of the Lords on their list, gaining the support of the Earls of Carlisle and Derby among others in the following weeks. MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 3 March 1789, 24 March 1789, 31 March 1789, 6 April 1789.

¹⁵³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 10 March 1789 and 17 March - 6 April 1789.

¹⁵⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 14 April 1789.

¹⁵⁵ *House of Commons Journals*, 1789; Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 267.

¹⁵⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 19 May 1789.

investigations but eventually conceded the enquiry.¹⁵⁷ In the aftermath of the debate, the Western Baptist Association met in Gloucestershire to thank the London Committee for their exertions and to send a second subscription of five guineas to the society's funds.¹⁵⁸ By 1792, Clarkson was well aware that 'petitions have a greater or lesser effect on the House, in proportion as they are well or ill-timed.'¹⁵⁹

In the second half of 1789, inertia possessed the London Committee. The appointment of the Commons committee was less than had been hoped for and with the end of the Parliamentary session on 23rd June, business almost ground to a halt. Clarkson was at first asked to tour the eastern and northern counties to procure further evidence for the investigations but news of the storming of the Bastille redirected him to Paris.¹⁶⁰ A report to correspondents and friends in the country, issued by the London Society on 28th July 1789, described the melancholy state of affairs which had prevented the speedy management of evidence before the Privy Council and the loss of Wilberforce's motion. The report also insisted that 'nothing short of total abolition' would be acceptable. The committees were asked to renew their subscriptions and to collect evidence. Four thousand copies were distributed in the next month.¹⁶¹ Meanwhile, the London meetings for this period reflect the lack of activity in Parliament. Having distributed the Report, the committee met to receive letters from correspondents and news from Clarkson in Paris. The only other business was the production of an abstract of the Privy Council evidence over the winter months.¹⁶²

In the early months of 1790, the London Society was spurred once more to action following letters from the Manchester and Plymouth committees who sent resolutions which they had recently adopted committing themselves to renewing efforts nationwide.¹⁶³ On 25 January 1790, Wilberforce persuaded the Commons to conduct the slave trade hearings through a select committee, thus speeding up the process considerably. Abstracts of the Privy Council evidence were ordered by the committee on the following day and the select committee began hearing the West Indians' evidence on the day after.¹⁶⁴ From February, the committee appointed a sub-committee

¹⁵⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 5 May 1789, 19 May 1789.

¹⁵⁸ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 25 June 1789.

¹⁵⁹ MSS Dr. William Dickson, 'Diary of a Visit to Scotland for the Abolition Committee, January - March 1792,' held at Society of Friends Library, London. Anonymous notes at back, probably by Clarkson. See later.

¹⁶⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 14 July 1789, 28 July 1789.

¹⁶¹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 28 July 1789, 25 August 1789.

¹⁶² MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 15 December 1789, 26 January 1790.

¹⁶³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 12 January 1790, 9 February 1790.

¹⁶⁴ Jennings, *Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade*, p. 58.

to procure evidence to be put before Parliament.¹⁶⁵ A letter to the country committees, ordered on 23 March 1790, asked provincial supporters to bring suitable witnesses to the attention of the London Society while the Parliament Street Coffee House was rented for the purpose of meeting and preparing witnesses.¹⁶⁶ This flurry of activity was occasioned in anticipation of the abolitionist witnesses who were first heard on 23 April. However, their evidence was not complete before Parliament was dissolved in June 1790 prior to a general election.¹⁶⁷ At the beginning of July, the secretary of the Abolition Society was asked to compile a list of members of the new Parliament.¹⁶⁸ When the new Parliament was known, the London Committee began preparing for renewed lobbying. One copy each of Clarkson's essays were sent to MPs.¹⁶⁹

The new Parliament did not meet until November 1790 and did not devote itself fully to hearing evidence until the following March. In the meantime, further accommodation was procured near Parliament (at No. 9, Palace Yard) for putting up witnesses for the abolition and copperplate prints of the *Brookes* were distributed to MPs.¹⁷⁰ The abstract and index of the evidence heard before the Privy Council was completed in March 1791 and immediately sent to be printed. The distribution of the abstract was evidently a key prop of the abolitionists' plan.¹⁷¹ However, the abolitionists were overtaken by events. Between 1789 and 1791, as the British Parliament investigated the slave trade, the free coloured population of the French sugar island of St. Domingue, enthused by the libertarian rhetoric which had crossed the Atlantic, appealed to the white leaders for civil and political rights.¹⁷² In early April, news reached London that relations between the white and free coloured inhabitants of the French sugar island of St. Domingue had descended to an all-time low and that rebellion was feared. A meeting of West Indian supporters in London appealed to the government to oppose abolition for the safety of the British colonies. Clarkson noted the tide quickly turned against the abolitionists.¹⁷³ The West Indians

¹⁶⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 9 February 1790.

¹⁶⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 23 March 1790.

¹⁶⁷ Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁶⁸ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 7 July 1790.

¹⁶⁹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III (BM Add. MSS 21,256): 28 September 1790.

¹⁷⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 14 December 1790, 1 February 1791.

¹⁷¹ James Phillips was unable to complete the printing of the second half 'in time to answer the purpose of the committee' and thus another printer was urgently sought. The task fell to Cooper of Bow Street. MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 22 March 1791, 5 April 1791.

¹⁷² James Walvin, *Black Ivory - A History of British Slavery* (1992), pp. 254-255; Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (1988), chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁷³ Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 210.

were quick to argue the point during the Parliamentary debate on Wilberforce's motion. When the vote was taken, the abolitionists lost by 163 votes to 88.¹⁷⁴

One can see from the preceding analysis that the first abolitionist mobilisation was a small-scale affair, reliant on a network of trusted correspondents, many of whom had been involved in abolitionism in the five years before the first nationwide petition campaign. The continuity of efforts with these prior exertions serves to underscore the all-pervading connection between the Abolition Society and the Society of Friends at the national and local levels. Quakers provided the beachhead for abolitionist activity in many places, perhaps including Manchester, and it was their agency which secured the petitions of 1788 once they had been called for. The Manchester society provided this impetus, although they too were reliant on pre-existing efforts. While they could not compete with London for resources, it was this very constraint which led the Manchester abolitionists to adopt public methods to publicise their activities, methods which the London Society had failed to use and subsequently adopted. Manchester thus aided the campaign far more by encouraging new methods of publicising the cause, used by London during the 1792 campaign, than by calling petitions, most of which fell on deaf ears following the creation of the parliamentary select committee on the slave trade. In the two years after the petitions were received, a period ignored by historians of popular mobilisation, the country correspondents continued to support the cause by collecting evidence and canvassing their MPs, reinforcing the lobbying activity of London at the local level. Abolitionist mobilisation in 1788 was more cautious, respectable and dependent on a few than has previously been appreciated but it was a fortuitous consequence of this close-knit structure that support for abolition persisted outside the years of petitioning.

¹⁷⁴ Jennings, p. 62, argues that the vote, taken on 19th April 1791, was lost because of the slave insurrection in St. Domingue but this only began in August. Clarkson's account, on which Jennings was reliant, is a little confused (*History*, II, pp. 208-212). Nevertheless, news of conflicts between the free coloured population and the French plantocracy did feature.

Chapter Three

THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN, 1791-1792.

LONDON, ABSTENTION AND POPULAR RADICALISM

The loss of Wilberforce's motion was a spur to abolitionist activity in London and later the provinces. In its fifth report (1791), the Society represented the recent occurrences as 'a delay rather than a defeat,' and instantly stepped up their activities. Wilberforce and Fox were elected to the London committee and more direct means were employed to inform the public across Britain. Five thousand copies of the abstract of evidence, previously distributed only to members of Parliament, were ordered for general distribution as were three thousand copies of the Commons debates. From May, the fifth report appeared in the London and local newspapers and 'great progress' had been made in the distribution of the Abstract by the end of August. During the last months of 1791, Clarkson once more toured the country for the London Society. As Clarkson was unable to canvass Scotland in time, Dr. William Dickson was asked to complete a tour in a north. Interest revived: in November, the society received several letters from the provincial correspondents who applied for books.¹ The spread of information was no doubt assisted in the last two months of the year by the publication of a cheap edition of the abstract of evidence by James Phillips.² Local supporters were jolted into activity in December by a renewed appeal for subscriptions to overcome the debts incurred through the Commons investigations.³ By the end of the year, a catalogue of the horrors of the slave trade had been produced in numerous editions, many of which were reprinted in cheaper forms by local committees. The intention, it became clear, was to launch another petition campaign.

The petition campaign of 1792 was organised and launched by the London Society. Preparations were made in secret. Notes at the back of Dickson's diary of his tour of Scotland provide a fascinating glimpse into these efforts. Here, a list of instructions for mobilising public opinion are recorded. Although the author is anonymous,

¹ MSS 'Minute Books of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade,' BM Add. MSS 21,256 (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Abolition Society, III'): 26 April 1791, 24 May 1791, 29 August 1791, 15 November 1791.

² MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 29 November 1791, 28 December 1791. 5,000 copies were in circulation by the end of 1791.

³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 29 November 1791, 13 December 1791.

Clarkson would seem the most likely candidate. Lessons had been learnt from the West Indians' superior tactics in 1789. The author noted that

‘If petitions were proposed to be the object, the news would soon transpire, and if it were to get to the ears of the planters, slave merchants, and West Indian Merchants they would endeavour to counteract the object, by getting counter-petitions from the same places.’

As a result, letters outlining the abolitionists' plan were ‘left in writing with every confidential friend; but with no person but of that description.’ Gentlemen across the country were asked to hide their true purpose by insisting that they distributed the abstract merely out of a sense of duty occasioned by having read the small pamphlet themselves:

‘They [the country gentlemen] themselves know what is the object of their own labours; but it is not necessary to state it to the publick who, if they knew that the reason of their being desired to read was to obtain signatures to petitions would not read at all. Let them be content to be going on informing the minds of the people, till the day arrives when it will be proper to disclose the design.’⁴

The intention was not simply to raise petitions but to create a truly abolitionist public who could be prevailed upon to petition with little difficulty. Furthermore, the abolitionists were considering the probability of working-class support: Dickson was told that ‘the manufacturers of earthenware, Staffordshire, petitioned 1788, and what is more in point, the Cutlers of Sheffield did themselves immortal honour by petitioning. Therefore common people, those of Leadhills, &c, may certainly petition.’⁵

This expectation was founded on the spread of the abstention campaign - a consumer boycott of slave-grown sugar - which emerged independently of the Abolition Society in the second half of 1791. The boycott had a long heritage (the Quakers had discountenanced slave produce in various ways for decades) but gained widespread acceptance as a tactic after its use in the struggle for American independence.⁶ Early abolitionist appeals sowed the seeds of abstention. Thomas Cooper, in discussing slavery's human cost, noted: ‘Good God, cries the astonished Reader, for what

⁴ MSS Dr. William Dickson, 'Diary of a Visit to Scotland for the Abolition Committee, January - March 1792,' in Friends House Library, London Anonymous notes on final pages.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement - Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 40-41

purpose? - *That the Gentlefolk of Europe, (my friend) may drink Sugar to their Tea!!*⁷ Historians have found it difficult to assign significance to the abstention. For many, the sugar boycott singularly failed to achieve its desired aim and appears as an aberration in the movement's history. For others, most recently Clare Midgley, abstention forged the 'domestic base' of abolitionist support and underpinned the culture of anti-slavery.⁸ However, abstention had a wider significance in relation to popular mobilisation. The boycott of 1791-92 injected a new lease of life into the abolition campaign at a time when it was trapped in investigations. Through it, new or previously hesitant supporters of the cause were brought into the abolition campaign. And petitions and committees were organised on the back of these efforts. If we observe abstention's actual effect, rather than judging it in relation to its intention, the importance of abstention for the 1792 campaign becomes clear.

The immediate origins of the abstention campaign lay in the defeat of April 1791. Within a few months, a pamphlet was produced independently of the London Committee which encouraged individuals to boycott slave-grown sugar. This tract, *An Address to the People of Great Britain on the Propriety of Abstaining from West Indian Sugar and Rum*, was the work of William Fox, a Baptist scribe and formerly a bookseller in Holborn.⁹ Fox argued that 'the wealth derived from the horrid traffic [had] created an influence that secures its continuance.' The people of England were entreated to 'sap its foundation' by refusing to accept 'the produce of robbery and murder.'¹⁰ The boycott was borne of frustration with Parliamentary measures and with West Indian opposition: 'Probably it [abstention] is the only effectual mode of addressing the evil complained of, for the legislature is not only unwilling but perhaps unable to apply a remedy.'¹¹ Fox looked to the consumer as the agent of the slave's suffering and therefore the agent of his relief. By so doing, he effectively argued a case for individual complicity in the suffering of the slaves and the maintenance of the slave trade: to eat a pound of sugar was to consume two ounces of human flesh. Abstention drew a direct line of connection between the British public and the slaves in the West Indies whose sufferings had been more clearly defined in the previous four years than at any time previously. It also echoed the emergent pressures of

⁷ Thomas Cooper, *Letters on the Slave Trade: first published in Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle; and since re-printed with additions and alterations* (Manchester, 1787), p. 25. Cooper's pamphlet was used by William Fox in his famous pamphlet which inaugurated the abstention campaign.

⁸ Clare Midgley, 'Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture,' *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (December 1996), pp. 137-162.

⁹ Anon, *A Vindication of the Use of Sugar and other products of the West India Islands, in answer to a pamphlet* (1792).

¹⁰ [William Fox], *An Address to the People of Great Britain on the consumption of West Indian Produce* (1791), p. 2.

¹¹ [William Fox], *Address to the People of Great Britain*, p. 6.

popular radicalism with its appeals for greater representation and Parliamentary reform. Now, every member of society could effect abolition. Abstention greatly extended the social base of abolitionism.

Although Fox's pamphlet appeared independently of the London abolitionists, the Abolition Society was not as hesitant about the abstention campaign as has previously been thought.¹² In their fifth report to the public, in the week after the April 1791 defeat, the London Committee stated that it could not accept 'that the luxuries of Rum and Sugar can only be obtained by tearing asunder those ties of affection which unite our species and exalt our nature.'¹³ Individual members of the London Committee were quick to support the distribution of Fox's pamphlet when it appeared. The third edition of Fox's pamphlet, and the following twenty-two editions which have survived, were printed by James Phillips. Clarkson also issued a circular address to the country correspondents encouraging them to purchase and distribute at least one thousand copies each of the tract through local booksellers. Clarkson wrote as an individual sympathiser and not as a member of the London Society, implying that either the London group disagreed over the measure or could not be seen officially to endorse it.¹⁴ Three days after Clarkson's circular was issued, William Allen gave a speech to an open meeting in London explicitly on the subject of the sugar boycott. Moreover, it was not long before the London Society followed suit. Two weeks later, Lloyd and Woods recommended the publication of William Bell Crafton's *Short Sketch of the Evidence given to the House of Commons Committee for the abolition of the Slave Trade* to the Committee which contained extracts from Fox's pamphlet recommended for the 'serious attention' of the people in general.¹⁵ 5,000 copies were immediately ordered for nationwide distribution.¹⁶ Although no appeals were made directly to the public to encourage the abstention, Crafton's *Short Sketch* was tantamount to official cognisance of the campaign and its validity. Clarkson credited both the *Short Sketch* and Fox's *Address* as the instigators of mass abstention.¹⁷

¹² Jennings argues that 'the London Abolition Committee did not officially endorse abstention,' even early in 1792. Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade* (1997), p. 69.

¹³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 26 April 1791.

¹⁴ Wedgwood collection on deposit at Keele University Archives, E32/24738.B. Thomas Clarkson to Josiah Wedgwood, 9 January 1792. This letter was printed and sent to several correspondents. Another copy can be found in the Thompson-Clarkson collection, Friends House Library, London, volume III.

¹⁵ W.B.C. [William Bell Crafton], *A Short Sketch of the Evidence given to the House of Commons Committee for the abolition of the Slave Trade: To which is added, a Recommendation of the Subject to the Serious Attention of People in General* (1792).

¹⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Committee, III: 21 January 1792.

¹⁷ Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 348.

These pamphlets fuelled interest in the abstention and abolition campaigns and rapidly produced an avalanche of similar titles. By the end of 1791, 70,000 copies of Fox's pamphlet had been printed by James Phillips and 25,000 families were believed to have left off the use of West Indian sugar.¹⁸ In fact, Fox's *Address* ran to at least twenty five editions, the first eighteen of which were produced in 1791 before the release of the *Short Sketch*.¹⁹ The *Address* in particular was rapidly appropriated by provincial presses. In Birmingham, the tract ran to ten editions before the year was out and similar versions were printed in Dublin in the early months of 1792. In London, one version addressed to the people of Ireland reached its sixth impression by the end of 1791.²⁰ Charles Wheeler, the proprietor of the *Manchester Chronicle*, quickly published three editions of one such pamphlet.²¹ One small pamphlet took the popular form of a conversation between Cushoo, a West Indian slave, and 'Mr. English' who was slowly convinced to give up slave sugar.²²

After the distribution of the *Short Sketch*, two particularly important pamphlets, neither of them originally issued by the London Society, forcefully argued the case for the sugar boycott. Around February-March 1792, Samuel Bradburn, a Methodist preacher in Manchester, issued an address to his co-religionists. In private, Bradburn had induced many friends to abstain from sugar and had himself abstained from all sugared products except medicines since October 1791, around the time of Fox's pamphlet.²³ Bradburn remarkably felt it his duty 'as sincerely to testify against the using Rum and sugar at present, as to preach the gospel.'²⁴ His appeal was founded principally on religious duty and the sin of receiving stolen goods. He also tried to counter any objections likely to be made: 'If you say you cannot drink your tea without sugar; suppose you were to lay aside tea also? I have done so, and found many considerable advantages by doing so.'²⁵ Bradburn estimated that his appeal would reach 400,000 Methodists, half of whom were women.

¹⁸ Wedgwood collection, E32/24738.B. Thomas Clarkson to Josiah Wedgwood, 9 January 1792.

Clarkson's hand-written note on this circular gives these details.

¹⁹ [William Fox], *Address to the People of Great Britain*. The library of the Society of Friends, London, holds twenty five editions of the tract which barely changed. Editions 1-18 are dated 1791, later editions have no date and may have come from the same year. The number of editions suggests how significant Fox's pamphlet actually was: the first eighteen editions were in circulation before the *Short Sketch* was printed.

²⁰ Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

²¹ Anon., *Considerations on the impropriety of consuming West India sugar and rum as produced by the oppressive labour of slaves* 3rd edn. (Manchester, 1792).

²² Anon., *No rum - no sugar; or, the voice of blood, being a conversation between a negro and an English gentleman* (1792).

²³ E. M. Hunt, 'The Anti-Slave Trade Agitation in Manchester,' *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 79 (1977), pp. 46-72, especially pp. 66-67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁵ Samuel Bradburn, *An Address to the People called Methodists; concerning the criminality of encouraging slavery* (Manchester, 1792), p. 16.

The second pamphlet released around this time used more distasteful methods. Andrew Burns' *A Second Address to the People of Great Britain containing a new, and most powerful argument to abstain from the use of West Indian sugar* described the production of sugar in graphic detail. He began with the fields and described the beatings inflicted on mothers and their children in a direct attempt to engage female sympathy. But he reserved the greatest horror for the processing of the sugar. Descriptions of slaves sweating while treading the cane and the spread of lice were designed to shock the reader; the discoveries of a dead half-burned slave stored in a rum cask (to add flavour) and the half-decayed corpse of a baby found in a hogshead of sugar were enough to turn to stomach.²⁶ The intention was to horrify rather than to convince but either method had the desired effect. Burns noted in his pamphlet how his use of these arguments at a dinner party had led to several ladies immediately resolving to leave off slave sugar (and no doubt the rest of their meal). Katherine Plymley, who received the pamphlet a few days after its release, recorded her immediate reaction:

‘The treatment the Slaves receive occasion parts of the process to be beyond measure disgusting - I barely look'd over the tract, having, as I hope & trust, on better motives, left off the use of Sugar it was unnecessary for any of us to look very particularly into the detestable means employed in making it...’²⁷

Katherine's reference to her 'better motives' is suggestive of the nature of abstention's appeal. These arguments reflected the sins of the outer world back on to the individual: to boycott slave sugar was to pledge oneself to a life free from sin, to an ideal of personal moral purity, and to dedicate oneself to salvation. As such, it had a powerful appeal, especially among the evangelical and non-conformist sections of the middle-class who sought the moral reformation of society around them. The abolitionists could also draw on 'middle-class and evangelical critiques of excessive aristocratic consumption,'²⁸ and once again link their arguments to discountenancing worldly pleasures. Although sugar had become a staple part of the British diet by the 1790s, abolitionists often presented it as a luxury and therefore as a commodity which could easily be given up.²⁹ The notion of individual complicity, stressed so clearly by

²⁶ Andrew Burns, *A Second Address to the People of Great Britain containing a new, and most powerful argument to abstain from the use of West Indian sugar* (1792).

²⁷ MSS Plymley diaries, book 5, c. 20 March 1792.

²⁸ Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery - The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (1992), p. 36.

²⁹ [William Bell Crafton], *Summary View of the evidence delivered before a Committee of the House of Commons, relating to the slave trade* (1792), p. 12. Crafton referred to sugar as 'a luxury which is such an inexhaustible source of calamity and iniquity.' These arguments may also have help to align the

William Fox, perhaps explains abstention's immediate success. But it also had the effect of extending the abolitionist message to groups who had perhaps previously felt unable to assist, to those who had been excluded from previous appeals to Parliament, namely women and in some cases the working population.³⁰ It also had the subversive appeal of a tactic which undermined parliamentary measures.

Here, the abstention movement ties in with the radical currents within British society. The French Revolution fuelled the discussion of liberties which had circulated since the Enlightenment. Many British observers at first welcomed the revolution and heralded it as the French equivalent of the Glorious Revolution of 1688: they included many abolitionists.³¹ The Liverpool circle, working under the cover of their literary society, welcomed the revolution wholeheartedly and were hostile to its critics. When Burke published his criticism of the revolution in November 1790, around which loyalism began to form, Dr. Currie presented a paper critical of Burke to the literary society in which he concluded that 'the same stem produces the thorn and the rose.'³² Indeed, Currie felt that Burke's 'fanatic book [had] done more to harm his cause than any thing whatever.'³³ In 1791, Roscoe produced *The Life, Death and Wonderful Achievements of Edmund Burke* in which he attacked Burke and defended Fox whose political ideas he felt remained steady in light of news from France. For the Liverpool Abolitionists, the French Revolution in its early days was a confirmation of their belief that theirs was a time of change and that they were on the side of progress. This same spirit captured the imagination of other provincial abolitionists who, from 1789, could be found as members of local Revolution Societies, celebrating the 14th July with annual dinners.³⁴

There was clearly a correlation between those who supported the French Revolution and the abolitionist movement. Clarkson, himself a fierce radical enthused by a personal visit to France following the storming of the Bastille, was so convinced of the fact that he asked one acquaintance in Cumberland to transmit to him the names of

abolitionists with working class supporters for whom sugar, especially in 1792 when prices were high, was a luxury.

³⁰ As we have seen, many of the petitions of 1788 came from privileged or interested bodies while relatively few came from inhabitants. Abstention extended an appeal to people in those areas where they had been unable to sign petitions or none had been raised.

³¹ James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (1986), pp. 111-112.

³² 'Criticisms of Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution', in W. W. Currie, *Memoir and Life of Dr. James Currie*, 2 Vols. (Liverpool, 1805).

³³ Letter from James Currie to Lieutenant Moore, 29 November 1792 in Currie, *Life of Currie*, volume II, p. 147.

³⁴ Thomas Walker, for example, was steward at the anniversary dinner of the French and Glorious Revolutions in Manchester. *Manchester Mercury*, 19 October 1790.

any supporters of the French cause locally to recruit them to the cause.³⁵ There were already long-standing connections between abolitionists and those who favoured political reform and many of these connections extended into the provinces.³⁶ In Manchester, the radical elite in Manchester *was* the abolitionist elite: Walker, Cooper and Falkner. In fact, Goodwin states that it was the anti-slavery work of these three men which brought them election to the Society for Constitutional Information in February 1788.³⁷ Moreover, when it fell to Walker to form the Manchester Constitutional Society in 1790, many of those prominent local individuals who subscribed to the abolition society joined him: members of the Lit and Phil, a large number of Unitarians, manufacturers such as George Phillips, professionals and dissenting ministers.³⁸ At the same time, the Manchester abolition committee began to espouse more radical ideas. In January 1790, a meeting of subscribers congratulated the French on 'those Great Principles of *universal* Liberty' and proceeding to press on the London Society measures to promote abolitionism in France. At the same meeting, they asked abolitionists not to vote for any candidate who did not pledge himself to abolition at the forthcoming general election.³⁹ The same intellectual currents which brought many individuals to oppose slavery brought them to support political reform.

Political radicalism was not, however, limited to middle-class reformers: this same libertarian philosophy began to enthuse working-class radicals across the country. In March 1791, the Society for Constitutional Information received a much needed shot in the arm with the publication of the first part of Paine's *Rights of Man*. While disavowing Paine's republicanism, the Society took it upon itself to disseminate the pamphlet and called upon provincial reform societies, such as that formed in Manchester, to assist.⁴⁰ Paine's pamphlet sold in unprecedented numbers and through the tub-thumpers and amateur orators reached hundreds more. The Society for Constitutional Information helped form provincial working men's corresponding

³⁵ Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 69. In February 1792, Clarkson wrote to Richard Reynolds, and probably other abolitionist contacts, asking for subscriptions to a fund of £100,000 he had planned to assist the National Assembly, MSS Plymley diaries, book 5.

³⁶ Walvin has noted that many of the members of the Society for Constitutional Information were early abolitionists. Granville Sharp, Capel Lofft, and Major Cartwright can be firmly located amid the activities of both the SCI and the abolition society. James Walvin, 'The impact of slavery on British radical politics, 1787-1838,' in Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 292 (1977), p. 344.

³⁷ Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty* (1979), p. 144. However, Walvin suggests that the Manchester abolitionists converted the SCI to abolition, 'The impact of Slavery on British radical politics,' p. 344.

³⁸ For the Manchester Constitutional Society see Goodwin, *op.cit.*, p. 147.

³⁹ *Manchester Mercury*, 5 January 1790. The London Society received letters from Manchester on this point throughout 1790 (MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II).

⁴⁰ Goodwin, *op.cit.*, chapter 6.

societies: by the end of 1791, committees existed in Manchester, Sheffield and Norwich while the London Corresponding Society was founded in the early months of 1792. How far the radical connections of these groups assisted the mobilisation of provincial support in organisational terms is unclear. By the time that the London Corresponding Society was drafting its constitution, the petition campaign of 1792 was over.⁴¹ However, by encouraging the discussion of abstract liberties throughout 1791, radicals effectively encouraged plebeian support for the abolitionist campaign.⁴² The support of working people, mobilised by these discussion, was effected in two ways: signatures to inhabitants petitions and abstention from slave grown produce. Popular politics bred a discussion of liberties and radicalism which found sustenance in the sugar boycott.

SUPPORTERS AND PETITIONS

Abstention certainly caused some abolitionists to consider their position carefully.⁴³ But any losses which may have resulted from qualms entertained by 'traditional' abolitionist supporters were almost certainly offset by the gains made by extending the boundaries of participation. William Allen, the prolific Quaker philanthropist and a member of the London Committee, was at pains to stress that all - men and women, rich and poor - could participate.⁴⁴ Women were quickly targeted: William Matthews, a Quaker in Bath, aimed his arguments directly at middle class women 'who sip their tea, and prattle round their tea-board.'⁴⁵ Appeals were also made to women by members of their own sex: the Irish Quaker, Mary Birkett wrote a poem encouraging her fellow countrywomen to follow the example of their English friends.⁴⁶ Of course, these appeals were a 'recognition that women held the responsibility for household purchases and made the decisions about family consumption,' but they were also a

⁴¹ The LCS's constitution was discussed in April and May 1792. Goodwin, *The op.cit.*, p. 195.

⁴² A good example is contained in a pamphlet entitled *Considerations on the Slave Trade; and the consumption of West India produce* (Hackney, 1791), produced by the Hackney Society: 'There is a point, beyond which, liberty, like air, cannot be compressed, and it should be remembered that if ever it recovers its elasticity, the violence and effect of the explosion will be exactly proportionate to the force by which it hath been confined. Let slave-merchants and slave-masters tremble.'

⁴³ See the Katherine Plymley's discussion of the pros and cons of abstention. MSS Plymley diaries, book 6.

⁴⁴ William Allen, *The Duty of Abstaining from the use of West India produce. A speech delivered at Coach-Maker's Hall, January 12th 1792* (1792), p. iv.

⁴⁵ Anon., *A letter on the greater necessity of an abolition of the African Slave Trade in consequence of the Insurrection at St. Domingo, prefaced by A Short Address to the Publick by W. Matthews* (Bath, 1792), p. 8.

⁴⁶ M[ary] Birkett, *A Poem on the African Slave Trade, addressed to her own sex*, 2 parts (Dublin, 1792).

recognition that any successful campaign of this kind required their support. There is now little doubt that women took the lead in the sugar boycott. One gentleman in Newcastle recorded how, on return to his house, he found that his wife and family had left off the use of sugar following their reading Fox's tract.⁴⁷ Female initiatives were also recorded in Norwich and Chester.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as the number of abstaining families were recorded, as opposed to individuals, one can further assume that female involvement was central.⁴⁹ This directs us towards other consumers hidden from the eye, children. The family of a Shropshire printer had begun to abstain before an edition of Fox's pamphlet had been printed by him: 'the little people [children] were the first to wish it.'⁵⁰ Katherine Plymley's niece and nephew were also avid supporters of the abstention:

'My Br. [brother] mention to Mr. Clarkson his little people's zeal in the disuse of Sugar & that little Jane had said she wou'd not use any till it came from Sierra Leone... I have before noticed it in this particular instance as among those children who are inform'd on the subject I have heard of more readiness to give up the use of Sugar than among grown people. We observ'd lately Panton's shoes look'd very brown & on enquiry we found he had given orders that they shou'd not be black'd because he understood Sugar was used in the composition...'

Clarkson, inspired by the example, remarked that 'the virtue of little Children was wonderful.'⁵¹ In his *History*, he later noted: 'even children, who were capable of understanding the history of the sufferings of the Africans, excluded, with the most virtuous resolution, the sweets, to which they had been accustomed, from their lips.'⁵²

One way of confirming the central importance of women is to look at the West Indian response to the abstention campaign. These previously unconsidered sources also suggest that women responded to the call upon them:

'The English ladies have patronised it [the sugar boycott]; to their kind and fostering protection it is much indebted. The heaven-born daughters of our isle, with all that delicate sensibility which is their distinguishing characteristic, were pierced to the heart with the sufferings of the oppressed Africans; and with a fortitude which does them the highest honour, refused to enjoy those sweets, which they supposed to be the price of blood.'⁵³

⁴⁷ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 37.

⁴⁸ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 215 fn 45.

⁴⁹ See *Sheffield Register*, 3 February 1792, in which a previous statement that 25,000 individuals had abstained was corrected to 25,000 families.

⁵⁰ MSS Plymley diaries, book 4.

⁵¹ MSS Plymley diaries, book 9.

⁵² Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 349.

⁵³ Anon., *Strictures on an Address to the People of Great Britain on the propriety of abstaining from West India sugar and rum* (1792), p. 4.

West Indian scribes were quick to use the prominence of women in the abstention campaign as a weapon against the abolitionists and played on ideas that women should not break their domestic confines and become involved with a campaign they represented as essentially political. It was easy for scribes to imply that women had been deluded or that their continued use of cotton was hypocritical. One reply to Fox's *Address* adopted the female voice to appeal to abstention's numerous women supporters. The tract considered the harmful effects of an immediate boycott on the lives of the slaves and argued that Fox 'proposeth means inadequate to the end, and recommends a real evil, on the vague supposition, that good may come.'⁵⁴

Abstention also drew support from the working class. The *Leicester Journal*, for example, extended its appeal to 'Plebeian, Peasant, Artist.'⁵⁵ Clarkson did not categorise the campaign as belonging to any clearly established group: abstainers 'were of all ranks and parties. Rich and poor, churchmen and dissenters, had adopted the measure.'⁵⁶ Samuel Bradburn's address to his fellow Methodists was directed explicitly at his congregation which included the radicalised artisan and working class of Manchester. Clarkson noted how Fox's pamphlet, and the example of abstention by individuals, produced an astonishing effect among those 'who can neither see nor have time to read the evidence published by our committee.'⁵⁷ Social emulation was a factor: 'in gentlemen's families, where the master had set the example, the servants had often voluntarily followed it.'⁵⁸ But equally there is evidence for abstention from more radical roots. Midgley notes a letter written from Lydia Hardy to her husband Thomas, the chairman of the London Corresponding Society, which suggests that artisan households were equally eager to abstain from West Indian sugar. Of course, one must consider the high price of slave sugar and its relative shortage at the time, but nevertheless Lydia Hardy's letter clearly stipulates that their decision to abstain was based on a moral objection to the slave trade 'for the people here are as much against it as enny ware [*sic*].'⁵⁹ Abstention had a radical appeal which was fully appreciated at the time. In Sheffield, where provincial political radicalism was perhaps the most active, the sugar boycott was fused with very powerful radical, perhaps levelling feelings, by Joseph Gales in his radical newspaper, the *Register*:

⁵⁴ Anon., *An Answer to a Pamphlet entitled an Address to the People of England against the use of West India produce* (n.d.).

⁵⁵ *Leicester Journal*, 13 January 1792, quoted in Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 215, fn 45.

⁵⁶ Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 349.

⁵⁷ Wedgwood collection, E32/24738.B. Thomas Clarkson to Josiah Wedgwood, 9 January 1792.

⁵⁸ Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 349.

⁵⁹ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 39.

‘... It is not doubted, but that the spurning these luxuries from us, till they could be procured independent of *Slavery*, would effectually abolish all the misery at present endured in their manufacture: and since the *parliament* of Great Britain sees not proper to comply with the wishes of its constituents, - at least every *uninterested* constituent - to effect this purpose let the *people* effect the wished-for event themselves - IT IS IN THEIR POWER.’⁶⁰

When the inhabitants of Sheffield petitioned in 1792, they made a point of attacking ‘the conscientious and increasing Duties on Sugar, Rum and other Productions of the West India Islands.’⁶¹

Quantifying the number of abstainers is an almost impossible task. With the exception of a few places, efforts were not generally made to make a register of the number of abstainers, nor did the London Society make efforts to record the extent of the campaign.⁶² Clarkson told the Plymleys that in London ‘252 persons left off the use of sugar on the publication of that little pamphlet,’ while he knew of many families across the country who had done the same, especially in Yorkshire and Devon.⁶³ In fact, he later estimated that that someone abstained in every town he visited, perhaps ten to fifty families in smaller towns rising to between two hundred and five hundred in larger ones.⁶⁴ Following the completion of his tour of England in January 1792, he told one Staffordshire abolitionist that 25,000 families had left off the use of West Indian sugar.⁶⁵ However, in the early months of 1792, with the release of the *Short Sketch*, other tracts, and the revival of petitioning, this number increased. The West Indians were in no doubt that the disuse of sugar had ‘of late become so general;’ one anti-abolitionists noted the circulation of Fox’s *Address* ‘with great industry throughout the kingdom,’ while another remarked on the ‘rapid and extraordinary manner’ of its distribution.⁶⁶ Local newspapers frequently commented on the numbers abstaining in towns across the country: as many as one thousand families abstained in Birmingham.⁶⁷ The Hackney abolitionists remarked that a Birmingham grocer now sold only half as much sugar as before, ‘that numbers have left off sugar at Norwich

⁶⁰ *Sheffield Register*, 11 November 1791.

⁶¹ *Sheffield Register*, 24 February 1792.

⁶² Two Quakers counted the number of abstainers in Cornwall and in Lincoln several women made a house-to-house canvass to extract pledges from families to boycott slave sugar. Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 216 *fn* 46.

⁶³ MSS Plymley diaries, book 1.

⁶⁴ Clarkson, *History*, III, p. 349.

⁶⁵ Wedgwood collection, E32/24738.B. Thomas Clarkson to Josiah Wedgwood, 9 January 1792. Clarkson’s hand-written note on this circular gives these details.

⁶⁶ Anon., *A Vindication of the Use of Sugar and other products of the West India Islands, in answer to a pamphlet* (1792), p. iii, 7; Anon., *Strictures on an Address to the People of Great Britain on the propriety of abstaining from West India sugar and rum* (1792), p. 4.

⁶⁷ *Sheffield Register*, 3 February 1792.

and Yarmouth' and that a local grocer had lost one third of his business.⁶⁸ In total, Clarkson suggested that as many as 300,000 people abstained in 1791-92 across England and Wales.⁶⁹

Historians have tended to judge the abstention campaign's impact in terms of its desired effect - the abolition of the slave trade - and have thus regarded abstention's 'peripheral successes' as the end of the matter.⁷⁰ Under this analysis, the boycott was doomed to failure. The abstention campaign occurred when West Indian sugar was in relatively short supply and the price of sugar was high. Furthermore, the campaign needed to be sustained longer than it was. While for many abolitionists, perhaps especially the Quakers, the decision to abandon slave produce was a moral imperative, others clearly viewed it as a tactic: Clarkson noted that, in consequence of the decision to abolish the trade in 1796, many members of the London Committee 'returned to the use of sugar.'⁷¹ Clarkson's had a very precise view of abstention's desired effect: 'Government could not obtain their [sugar] revenue unless they gratified the wishes of the people by the abolition of the Slave-Trade.'⁷² William Allen argued on the same grounds that:

'If, as is generally believed, the MINISTRY are *divided* on the question respecting the ABOLITION, nothing seems so likely to *unite them* in support of that just and necessary measure, as the prospect of a *certain diminution of REVENUE*, if it be not speedily affected.'⁷³

In the first three months, sugar revenue was believed to have fallen by £200,000 pounds⁷⁴ but the trend evidently did not continue. To maintain pressure on the sugar producers, abstention had to be sustained. Substitution was not a valid option until the 1820s when the abolitionists made deliberate efforts to support its cultivation and availability.⁷⁵ Thus, abstention was unlikely to succeed. However, this analysis downplays abstention's important opinion-forming function. Firstly, by stressing personal guilt, abstention made abolition a matter of direct personal relevance as well

⁶⁸ Anon. [Hackney Society?], *Considerations on the Slave Trade; and the consumption of West India produce* (Hackney, 1791), p. 16. Katherine Plymley also recorded that Wright of Haverhill, a local grocer, had printed an advertisement which stated 'that he cannot with a safe conscience trade in that article till he can procure it through a purer channel.' MSS Plymley diaries, book 5, 11 March 1792.

⁶⁹ Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 350.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

⁷¹ Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 461.

⁷² Wedgwood collection, E32/24738.B. Thomas Clarkson to Josiah Wedgwood, 9 January 1792.

⁷³ William Allen, *Duty of Abstaining from the use of West India produce* (1792), p. iv.

⁷⁴ Wedgwood collection, E32/24738.B. Thomas Clarkson to Josiah Wedgwood, 9 January 1792. Statement of revenue loss noted by Clarkson on the reverse.

⁷⁵ The abolitionists made efforts to produce free sugar in Sierra Leone but the first cargo was not received until 1793.

as bringing it into the home. Secondly, it allowed all members of society to participate in the campaign and thus extended the abolitionists' appeal far wider than had previously been possible. And, thirdly, it alerted the public at large to other means of protesting against the slave trade, most notably petitioning. It is ironic that abstention grew from dismay with appeals to Parliament as it provided the basis for renewed petitioning in 1792.

Both Clarkson and Dickson were well aware of the benefits of abstention to the forthcoming petition campaign. Having observed the spread of zeal throughout England as a result of the abstention, Clarkson recommended the widespread distribution of Fox's pamphlet. The effect it had produced, he wrote, 'may be called astonishing, for it is certainly a matter of surprise, that hundreds should be found to debar themselves, and that suddenly, from the luxuries, or (what indeed many have considered in consequence of habit to be) the necessaries of life.'⁷⁶ As this effect had been 'almost *uniformly produced in proportion to the extent of its circulation,*' Clarkson asked his friends 'to fix upon some Bookseller or shopkeeper in your town or neighbourhood, and to desire him to order a thousand, with a view of disposing them to his customers and others at the easy rate affixed.'⁷⁷ Clarkson was convinced that the pamphlet had created sympathy for their cause and had paved the way for signatures. Certainly, the sugar question spilled over into petitions as Clarkson predicted: the Corporation of York, in sending their petition for 1792 to their representatives, also sent a letter requesting them 'to support or institute an enquiry into the present high price of sugar and use their endeavours to remedy the evil.'⁷⁸ Furthermore, provincial sympathisers 'were not satisfied, many of them, with the mere abstinence from sugar; but began to form committees to correspond with that of London.'⁷⁹ The *Sheffield Register* noted that local Quakers, 'after doing their utmost, by Example, to discourage the Use of West India Sugar and Rum,' were now forming a local committee to organise a petition to Parliament.⁸⁰ Dickson's diary and letters make similar remarks for Scotland. On arrival in Edinburgh, Dickson found that two 'eminent and learned' gentlemen, a 'Divine' and an 'Advocate,' who were once against the abolition of the slave trade, had joined the local society after they had read Fox's pamphlet. 'I have met with no man who has read it without conviction,' Dickson observed. Indeed, Dickson clearly felt that the power of the abstention

⁷⁶ Wedgwood collection, E32/24738.B. Thomas Clarkson to Josiah Wedgwood, 9 January 1792..

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ York City Archives, MSS City of York House Book, 1780-92, Vol. 45. Commons petition, 3 February 1792, p. 443.

⁷⁹ Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 351.

⁸⁰ *Sheffield Register*, 7 February 1792.

campaign to mobilise popular support was central to the success of the campaign in Scotland:

‘Our cause gains ground in Edin^h and wherever the Abs^t has reached: but the circulation beyond Edin^h and Glasgow began just *last week!*... Had the Abs^t been spread here and Clarkson or myself had gone round to explain it, I think we might have carried all Scotland...’⁸¹

Clarkson’s estimate of 300,000 abstainers during the 1791-92 campaign is highly suggestive as it is comparable with Drescher’s suggested figure of 390,000 signatories of the petitions of 1792.⁸² Although women were unable to sign petitions at the time, they may have succeeded in recruiting their men-folk to the abolitionist cause.⁸³ The working men’s corresponding societies, whose radical outlook so reinforced the appeal to abstain, may have assisted greatly in rallying signatures from their own members and friends.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, both Clarkson and Dickson provide ample evidence to suggest that the abstention campaign’s strengths and importance lay in its ability to revive interest and to extend that interest to every individual throughout society not in its attempt to abolish the slave trade by direct economic means.

THE PETITIONS OF 1792

The petition campaign of 1792 demonstrated an unprecedented level of support for the cause. In January 1792, country correspondents and committees were informed to raise petitions in time for 18th March. This time, the Society intended the appeals made to be more consistent: at the end of the month, the London Society inserted a minute in papers throughout the country correcting the misrepresentation that the Society sought emancipation and reiterating its appeal for the total abolition of the slave trade. The Manchester Society also called for petitions but after London’s example: its own circular letter was issued around 11th February.⁸⁵ On 21st February 1792, another letter was written to ‘Friends in the Country’ to expedite the raising and sending of petitions. A week later, committees were asked to send copies of their petitions to the London Society with the number of signatures affixed and to raise

⁸¹ Thompson-Clarkson collection, vol. II. Letter from William Dickson, Edinburgh to James Phillips, 14 January 1792.

⁸² Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

⁸³ See the example of a Newcastle family. *Newcastle Courant*, 7 January 1792, quoted in Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 37.

⁸⁴ Walvin, ‘The impact of slavery on British Politics,’ *passim*.

⁸⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 14 February 1792.

them at public meetings. It therefore seems likely that the London Society desired the greatest number of signatures as well as petitions.⁸⁶

The London Society reinforced the campaign with a flood of publications. At the beginning of February, more copies of the *Debates* were ordered. 10,000 copies of the *Short Sketches of Evidence* had been printed by the end of the month. The London Society also ensured that information which supported their case from across the country was repeated in the national press: the Nottingham Committee was asked to print its resolutions widely. Most importantly, the metropolitan and provincial press was regularly furnished with a list of petitions presented during the session including extracts from them.⁸⁷ By these means, the London Society used the newspapers to show that a truly nationwide mobilisation was in progress and to spur lethargic supporters to action by example. Katherine Plymley recorded the number of petitions presented which were frequently reported in her local newspaper.⁸⁸

The Society also acted quickly to limit the damage caused by events in St. Domingue. In August 1791, the slave population entered the conflict and the insurrection rapidly descended into race-war. 'Proper' reports of the rebellion began to reach Britain and France in November. Although Blackburn observes that the St. Domingue revolt 'could only strengthen the view that Britain had little to fear from French colonial competition,'⁸⁹ the initial effect was more damaging for the abolitionists. Wilberforce was forced to postpone his motion (although the London Committee were resolute) and supporters across the country began to confuse the issues of abolition and emancipation once again.⁹⁰ In January 1792, the West Indians produced their *Particular Account* of the insurrection in which the views of the London Society were 'industriously misrepresented.'⁹¹ Clarkson was quick to redress the balance by rapidly producing *The True State of the Case Respecting the Insurrection* of which one thousand copies were immediately ordered for distribution.⁹² Clarkson attempted to redefine the interpretation of revolutions, and to use the St. Domingue incident to argue that only abolition could prevent the same from spreading to the British islands:

⁸⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 10 January 1792 - 28 February 1792.

⁸⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 7 February 1792 - 6 March 1792.

⁸⁸ MSS Plymley diaries, books 4 to 9.

⁸⁹ Walvin, *Black Ivory - A History of British Slavery* (1992), pp. 254-255; Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (1988), chapters 5 and 6.

⁹⁰ R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 5 vols. (1838). Volume I, p. 340.

⁹¹ Anon., *Particular Account of the Commencement and Progress of the Insurrection of the Negroes in St. Domingo* (1792); MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 31 January 1792.

⁹² MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 14 February 1792.

abolition became a matter of national security.⁹³ Meanwhile, provincial abolitionists were urged to incorporate appeals on this basis, with direct reference to St. Domingue, in their petitions.⁹⁴ The Sheffield inhabitants petition thus argued that the abolition of the slave trade, 'with the consequent milder treatment of those who were at present on the Islands, would be the most effectual Means of removing the Danger of Insurrections.'⁹⁵ The Scarborough Society, in a handbill appeal to the inhabitants, noted:

'Yea, many terrible scenes have already been perpetrated and many more, and more terrible, doubtless, will follow, if this abominable trade continue. - Vengeance is the LORD's, and He will repay: Britons! beware. Look at St. Domingo! Ye that sanction and support Slavery - and ye that carry on this horrid infernal traffic - believe, tremble and repent...'⁹⁶

Significantly, the London abolitionists may have privately accepted the claims of the West Indians. William Dickson was told before his tour that 'the West Indians ought, for their own interest and safety, let the abolition be carried without opposition; otherwise as the friends of humanity are resolved to persevere, the consequences may possibly be insurrections.'⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the dramatic tableau of the St. Domingue rebellion was rapidly absorbed into abolitionist arguments and used in local and national appeals.

By the time that the session was over, 519 petitions had been presented to the Commons. Although the networks of association were wider and abolition had found more general support, country correspondents were once again of principal importance in the raising of petitions, none more so than the Quakers. A survey of the correspondence between provincial abolitionists and the London Society shows that one-third of those who contacted the Society with petitions were members of the Society of Friends. If one looks purely at English correspondents, the proportion is nearer one-half. Now forewarned of a petition campaign, these men had quintupled the number of petitions received. As Drescher has observed, 'in most respects the

⁹³ See above pamphlet and MSS Plymley diaries, book 5, 15 February 1792. Clarkson is recorded as having noting that 'the insurrection in St. Domingo so far from affording arguments against the abolition calls upon us to redouble our own efforts if we have any value for our own islands.'

⁹⁴ MSS Plymley diaries, book 5, 18 February 1792. 'Mr. Gisbourne in his letter says it will be advisable where it can be done to mention in the petitions the Insurrection in St. Domingo as an additional motive for Abolishing the Slave Trade. In compliance with this my Br. has sent a paragraph to that purpose to Ludlow & Wenlock, it was too late to insert one in the other places under his care.'

⁹⁵ *Sheffield Register*, 24 February 1792.

⁹⁶ Joseph Taylor (Scarborough Abolition Society), begins: 'To the Public.' (Scarborough, 1792).

⁹⁷ William Dickson, 'Diary of a Visit to Scotland for the Abolition Committee, January - March 1792,' notes on final pages.

pattern of 1788 was repeated, but on a more comprehensive scale.⁹⁸ But if we take this five-fold increase as a standard figure we can judge the changes within abolitionism between 1788 and 1792. The most startling increase was the number and proportion of inhabitants petitions. Both petitions from inhabitants alone and from inhabitants and restricted groups rose by from twenty five petitions each in 1788 to over two hundred in 1792. In total, the number of petitions which included the signatures of the inhabitants at large rose from fifty to just under four hundred and thirty in the new campaign, an increase in excess of eight-fold, and increase from 50% of the total in 1788 to over 80% in 1792. By contrast the number of petitions which originated with closed groups and corporations did not increase to the same proportion as the number of petitions overall. Corporation petitions, and those from corporations and other groups combined, increased three-fold. Oldfield has calculated that petitions from universities, guilds, presbyteries and provincial synods - groups who organised petitions exclusively from their own members - rose from around twenty to forty seven petitions in 1792, in effect a percentage fall from twenty percent to under ten percent. Thus the increasing proportion of inhabitants petitions was at the expense of a slowing down of corporation petitions and a proportional fall in petitions from closed groups. It is fair to suggest that this can be linked to widening participation in the abolitionist movement, principally as a result of abstention and political radicalism.⁹⁹

If we consider the spatial distribution of the 1792 petitions, further conclusions can be drawn. The number of county petitions rose from ten to twelve yet, if we look at those which participated, there was a significant decline among English counties. Though all ten county petitions in 1788 were from England only Staffordshire renewed its petition in 1792. It was joined by three other English counties (Derbyshire, Shropshire and Northumberland), five Welsh counties and four from Scotland, none of which had sent county petitions during the preceding campaign. This may simply reflect the complexity of county petitions, that those who had tried to organise them in 1788 found them too time-consuming. But the results are still peculiar in light of the fact that the London Society had stipulated that 'petitions from Towns will not render those from Counties unnecessary,' and that Clarkson expected petitions to be raised in all counties except Hereford, 'where a friend to the cause was much wanted.'¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, every English county was represented to some extent in the 1792 campaign. In particular, the south-west of England became more active while a cluster of petitions appeared in the counties around London where before there had been few.

⁹⁸ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

⁹⁹ Oldfield would seem to concur, *op.cit.*, p. 107.

¹⁰⁰ Abolition Society circular dated 19 January 1792; MSS Plymley diaries, book 6, 24 February 1792. Hereford actually petitioned in 1792.

Again, the north of England proved to be a key area of support. William Smith noted that 'while the concurrence is undoubtedly general in the southern part of this island, it is yet nothing to that perfect unanimity which prevails on that subject among our brethren in the North.'¹⁰¹ Scotland also entered the petition campaign in force, with petitions raised by inhabitants, presbyteries, trades, universities and local officials, thanks in no small part to the combined efforts of William Dickson and the Edinburgh committee.

In terms of types of petitions raised and participating places, the opportunities for members of the populace to become involved greatly increased. It is useful to compare the continuities between the first and second campaigns. In total, ninety-three towns, boroughs and counties sent petitions in 1788. Almost two thirds (sixty-nine) of these places renewed their petitions in 1792. Of the twenty-four places which did not renew their petitions, nine were the English counties previously mentioned, two were northern towns and eight were towns from the south (others came from Scotland and Wales). What is more interesting than the continuity of support, especially in the north, is the way in which the type of petitions raised changed. One third of those petitions renewed adopted a wider franchise, i.e. petitions from corporations now included the corporation and inhabitants, or petitions from the corporation and inhabitants became simply inhabitants petitions. The other petitions which were renewed, with one or two exceptions, kept the same franchise as before. Furthermore, only twelve places sent petitions exclusively from privileged bodies (as compared to thirty-three places in 1788), while five of these areas also sent separate petitions which had a wider franchise. This would appear to confirm the suggestion that privileged groups were under increasing pressure to extend the opportunities for participation in their renewed petitions and that many relented. However, it must be noted that despite many appeals from newspapers and individuals for ladies petitions, none were raised at this time.¹⁰²

Approximately four hundred new places participated in the 1792 campaign, significantly increasing the number of signatories. However, one must bear in mind the types of places which joined. Many of these new towns were little more than villages, such as Hawkshead and Furness in the Lake District and Hedon and Richmond in Yorkshire. Qualms were certainly raised over petitions from small borough or villages. Plymley approved of the Bridgenorth petition which was signed by little over one hundred and fifty names yet 'had not made up his mind on the

¹⁰¹ Dickson, 'Diary of a Visit to Scotland,' 4 May 1792.

¹⁰² *York Courant*, 21 February 1792 contains one such appeal.

propriety of such a small town's [Shifnal] petitioning.¹⁰³ His own petition for Shrewsbury was signed by three hundred individuals, while the county petition for Shropshire, despite a wide circulation, garnered only 464 signatures.¹⁰⁴ Abolitionist concerns were to raise 'respectable' petitions, by which a number of meanings can be interpreted but numerous signed would appear to be the most applicable during the 1792 campaign.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, many of these new places will have gathered very few signatures, certainly when compared to large urban centres such as Edinburgh and Glasgow which raised in excess of 9,000 and 13,000 names respectively.¹⁰⁶ Based on the records of forty-four petitions (8.5% of the total), Drescher has estimated that the petitions of 1792 may have been signed by as many as 390,000 people, an estimate which may be a little high since this would put the average number of signatories at around 750 people. Nevertheless, in the context of the 1814 campaign, when 750,000 names were rallied in a shorter space of time, Drescher's estimate is probably only slightly exaggerated.¹⁰⁷

The petitions of February-April 1792 reached a crescendo in the days before Wilberforce opened the debate. The cautiousness of abolitionist mobilisation was apparently successful as no counter-petitions from the West India lobby were presented. Nevertheless, on 2 April 1792, Wilberforce's motion for total abolition was effectively defeated in the Commons when Dundas amended the resolution to gradual abolition. By so doing, Dundas split the waverers in the Commons and allowed a revised motion for gradual abolition at an unspecified date to be passed.¹⁰⁸ On the afternoon of the same day, the London Committee met to consider what to do in consequence of the Commons' vote. They decided to oppose the Commons' decision on grounds of moral principle. The members of the Commons had agreed that the trade was cruel and unjust yet they permitted its continuance for an unspecified time. Fearing redoubled cruelties, the London abolitionists demanded that nothing short of immediate abolition was acceptable. The resolution was ordered to be printed and

¹⁰³ MSS Plymley diaries, book 5, 18 February 1792.

¹⁰⁴ MSS Plymley diaries, books 6 and 7.

¹⁰⁵ Abolitionists were frequently concerned to ensure that their petitions would be 'respectable' but their use of the term is highly ambiguous. Most historians see the term as a description of the signatories: their middle-class background, their positions of local influence and authority, their role as pillars of the community. However, the term can equally be taken to mean numerous, influential or unanimous. In the notes to Dickson, the author stated that 'If Corporation and People happily agree, they both sign. If divided, one of them. But Petitions from the People are the most respectable, except when both are unanimous.' Clearly social standing was not the key determinant here. Dickson, 'Diary of a Visit to Scotland,' notes on final pages.

¹⁰⁶ MSS Plymley diaries, book 7.

¹⁰⁷ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 82. Drescher's petition estimates are drawn from newspaper reports but the petitions, and certainly those of the principal towns, tended to be recorded over small villages.

¹⁰⁸ Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

distributed as were adverts for renewed subscriptions and continued efforts.¹⁰⁹ In a letter to a York contact, the Committee said that the late decision 'seems to take the system entirely out of the Hands of the Country into those of the House of Commons... but we should not be so discharged.'¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, some supporters, satisfied by a gradual abolition, were so discharged. Even amid the appeals for the total abolition of the slave trade, the Reading petition had merely asked for further regulation.¹¹¹ In the days after the decision, a Birmingham artisan presented Wilberforce with a carved medallion depicting a slave trampling on his chains in celebration of the Commons' decision.¹¹² Nevertheless, for many the latest vote was less than had been hoped. In the week after the passage of the gradual abolition motion, Rev. Thomas Gisborne wrote a pamphlet appealing to the British people to 'wash their hands from having any concern in bringing in a bill for *gradual* abolition.' The British people had 'manifested their detestation of the Slave Trade with a nearer approach to unanimity, with more decided conviction, and... with more knowledge of the subject in question, than was ever experienced before.'¹¹³ The same points were reiterated by the Manchester committee which pledged itself never to 'weaken their Determination of persisting in the use of all Means in their power to procure the Abolition of this inhuman Traffic.'¹¹⁴ The Newcastle committee also appealed for immediate abolition and issued a statement which noted that 'the Proposal of a *gradual* Abolition is by no means a Compliance with the general Wishes of the People, so strongly declared in their numerous Petitions to Parliament.'¹¹⁵ Similar appeals echoed around the country.¹¹⁶

At the end of April, the House of Commons agreed that the slave trade should be abolished gradually: the date of its termination was set as 1796, four years earlier than had initially been proposed. However, when the resolutions of the Commons were sent to the Lords, the West Indians once more succeeded in launching an investigation

¹⁰⁹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 5 April 1792, 10 April 1792.

¹¹⁰ The letter is reprinted in the *York Courant*, 10 April 1792.

¹¹¹ Clarkson, *History*, II, p. 354.

¹¹² *York Courant*, 1 May 1792.

¹¹³ Thomas Gisborne, *Remarks on the late decision of the House of Commons respecting abolition of the slave trade* (1792), pp. 48-49; MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 17 April 1792, 24 April 1792.

¹¹⁴ *Manchester Mercury*, 20 May 1792.

¹¹⁵ Newcastle resolutions printed in *York Courant*, 17 April 1792.

¹¹⁶ A public meeting was held in Scarborough, *York Herald*, 14 April 1792. The Ministers and Elders of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr also condemned the decision and feared for divine retribution, *York Herald*, 21 April 1792. The nobility, clergy and principal inhabitants of Wicklow in Ireland also urged Wilberforce to 'proceed, and overcome - redeem your Country from its foul reproach.' *York Courant*, 25 June 1792.

into the abolitionists' claims. Hearings began on the 8th and continued until mid-June when the Lords postponed their investigation until the next session. Dismayed, the London Committee once more urged abolitionists to continue their efforts but ultimately to no avail.¹¹⁷ The same popular mobilisation which had brought the abolitionists such success during the petition campaign tarred them with the brush of radicalism. With the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, the 'monstrous fabric of iniquity and blood'¹¹⁸ was indeed overthrown in a sudden and violent manner as Dr. Currie had predicted but abolitionist support began to drop away.¹¹⁹ By February 1793, Britain was at war with France and all manner of popular mobilisation came under attack. In June 1793, a sub-committee of the London Society was appointed to consider the state of the cause and to suggest methods for promoting its success.¹²⁰ As Oldfield has observed, their response - to recommend to friends throughout the country the immediate disuse of West Indian sugar and rum - reveals the impotence of the cause at this time.¹²¹ One thousand copies of a letter to this effect were distributed in August but six weeks later, the committee decided that all proceedings on pressing abstention 'be suspended for the present.'¹²² In fact, the cause had died. The melancholy report of the Committee, dated 20th August 1793, lamented that the Lords had only heard evidence for five days and that the slavers had yet to be examined.

'Unless a quicker progress be made in the Examination of Evidence in the Lords than hitherto, the Resolution in the Commons to abolish the Slave-Trade in 1796 may be totally defeated and the hopes conceived from the numerous Petitions of the People be in a great measure disappointed.'

Evidently, the last duty left for provincial abolitionists was prayer: 'With the blessing of Providence, we must eventually succeed.'¹²³

In this chapter we have seen how abstention acted as a two-edged sword. The moral dimension stressed by the supporters of abstention resulted in the recruitment of a wide anti-slavery public, incorporating all classes of society and men and women of all ages, thus significantly extending the boundaries of participation. But it also had a radical appeal, one appreciated by contemporaries, which ultimately reinforced the

¹¹⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 19 June 1792.

¹¹⁸ Letter from Dr. Currie to Lieutenant Moore, February 1789 in *Life of Currie*, volume II. Of course, Currie was writing after the calling of the Estates General and confrontation was expected.

¹¹⁹ Dr Currie to Lieutenant Moore, 29 November 1792 in *Life* volume II, p. 147. Currie had to take comfort in the idea that 'great changes are never produced by amiable, polished and refined characters.' See Mark Jones, 'The Nature of the Liverpool movement for the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1787-1807,' BA dissertation, University of York (1995).

¹²⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 18 June 1793.

¹²¹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 18 June 1793, 20 June 1793; Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

¹²² MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 9 July 1793, 30 July 1793, 13 August 1793.

¹²³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 20 August 1793.

perceived connections between political reform and abolitionism and which tarred the movement in the mid-1790s. Nevertheless, we have seen how members of the London Society (especially Clarkson) were quick to use the sugar boycott to help them to raise petitions. This previously under-appreciated aspect of the 1792 mobilisation strengthens Midgley's conclusion that the abstention movement cultivated a domestic anti-slavery which underpinned the culture of the movement but also suggests that the boycott ultimately allowed the enemies of abolition, and conservative elements within the abolitionist ranks, to present anti-slavery as a Jacobinical invention which threatened the security of the nation. The defeat of abolitionism in this way in the mid-1790s is appreciated more if one appreciates the organisational importance of the sugar boycott in 1791-1792.

Chapter Four

ABOLITIONISTS AND COMMITTEES IN THE PROVINCES, 1787-1792.

In the previous chapters we saw how provincial supporters contributed to the national campaign between 1787 and 1792. But who were they and what did their activities entail? From 1788, permanent committees were formed throughout the country to assist the London Society in its efforts. It is worth noting that in some places the creation of a formal committee was not essential. An influential individual could raise a requisition for a public meeting as effectively as a committee, and frequently did so.¹ A small group of families, such as the Quaker Tukes of York, could canvass for wider support. Furthermore, a committee was not necessary to distribute tracts, insert articles in newspapers, lobby MPs and find witnesses for the Privy Council investigations. Nevertheless, committees were formed in greater numbers from 1788 following the requests of members of the London Society.²

Many of these branch societies coalesced around the country correspondents or local liberal-minded groups already engaged in collective action or philanthropic works. The committees at Manchester, Liverpool and Derby drew heavily on their local Literary and Philosophical Societies. In York and Bristol, Quaker families active before 1787 remained at the core. Evangelical friends of Wilberforce, like William Mason and Dr. Burgh of York or Samuel Tooker of Rotherham, Thomas Clarke of Hull and William Hey of Leeds, were important members of their local committees. These committees were temporary bodies, formed for the express purpose of drafting, raising and transmitting petitions to Parliament.³ Occasionally, a permanent committee was elected at public meetings although in practice this entailed little more than recognising the existing body. Most committees included all subscribers although there is no evidence that women, who subscribed in significant numbers, sat on provincial committees.⁴ Some committees were therefore large affairs: the Manchester committee consisted of thirty-one individuals.⁵ Furthermore, some had influence over a wide geographical area: the York committee received subscriptions from Beverley,

¹ MSS Corbett of Longnor Papers, Diaries of Katherine Plymley (Ref. 1066), held in Shropshire Record Office, Shrewsbury (hereafter cited as MSS 'Plymley diaries'). See Joseph Plymley's efforts in book 4.

² Roscoe papers, 920 ROS, in Liverpool Public Record Office. No. 239, John Barton to William Roscoe, 21 January 1788; No. 241, John Barton to William Roscoe, 7 February 1788.

³ *Manchester Mercury*, 1 January 1788; *Sheffield Register*, 19 January 1788.

⁴ At York and Sheffield, every subscriber was invited to attend. *York Courant*, 12 February 1788; 19 February 1788, *Sheffield Register*, 26 January 1788.

⁵ *Manchester Mercury*, 1 January 1788.

some thirty miles away, while the Newcastle committee had its own corresponding members and delegates from Gateshead, North Shields and South Shields.⁶ Committees also divided areas between themselves to ensure blanket coverage of the country. These bodies became the nodes of abolitionist support. The men who sat on these committees were the most active of abolitionist supporters and the principal individuals whose activities we shall discuss.

WHO WERE THE ABOLITIONISTS?

A more detailed picture of the nature of abolitionist support has emerged as the focus of historiographical study has shifted from London to the provinces. Here it is worth distinguishing between supporters and organisers and referring to our original definition of 'abolitionists.' The identity of most anti-slavery sympathisers remains unknown: signed petitions have not survived nor is it a straight-forward matter to gauge the extent and nature of working-class support for the cause. However, historians have been able to isolate those individuals who were 'active beyond the signing of petitions' through the pages of local newspapers and the records of the Abolition Society. It is this group with whom we shall be principally concerned: those who became the agents of anti-slavery mobilisation in the provinces.

As one might suspect from the theological origins of abolitionism, dissenters were prominent early supporters. Although technically excluded from prominent positions of local responsibility, non-conformists had obtained greater political influence in the preceding decades. Samuel Shore of Norton Hall near Sheffield was a prominent dissenter and abolitionist who took the office of High Sheriff without taking the sacramental test.⁷ Nevertheless, they still laboured under the weight of exclusion (a sense of which increased during the campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-90) and could see in their own appeals for liberty a parallel with the oppression of the slaves. Many of the Manchester abolitionists belonged to the Cross Street Unitarian chapel, the largest of its kind in the north of England. In Liverpool, Quakers and Unitarians heavily outnumbered the two or three Anglicans in the local abolitionist circle. In York, Hull and Leeds, Quakers co-operated with members of the Established church.⁸ The intensity of support from dissenting

⁶ E. M. Hunt, 'The North of England agitation for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1780-1800,' MA thesis, University of Manchester (1959). chapter 4.

⁷ Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty* (1979), p. 78.

⁸ E. M. Hunt, *op.cit.*, chapter 4, *passim*.

communities was historically based: dissenters contributed more in areas where they were numerically strong and consequently more influential. Thus, Quakers were notably active in the committees of the south-west of England, as Clarkson's *History* and Oldfield's recent researches show.⁹ The London Society's contacts in Kendal, once the home of George Fox, were also Quakers - the Wilsons and Crewdsons - whose families continued to support abolitionism into the 1820s and 1830s. Quakerism was also strong more generally across the north of England. Methodism also took hold in the new urban centres: in Manchester, Rev. Samuel Bradburn was able to rally his own congregation and his fellow Methodist preachers to support abolition.¹⁰ The changing nature of British urban culture found abolitionists supporters with the ear of the people.

Dissenting ministers were often active members of local committees. Bradburn was elected to the Manchester Committee at around the same time that he rallied the Methodists.¹¹ William Turner, the Unitarian minister of Hanover Square chapel, Newcastle upon Tyne, was the chairman and leading figure of the local abolitionist committee. Rev. George Walker, the Presbyterian minister of High Pavement chapel in Nottingham, was also a local chairman and both an energetic abolitionist and exponent of political reform. The list of London's country correspondents also included Joseph Priestley. For each of these well known figures there are a host of less prominent ministers who were equally zealous in the cause. When the Unitarian Chapel on Kaye Street in Liverpool was opened in September 1791, one local minister, John Yates, gave an impromptu sermon on the enormities of the slave trade. Regular attendees at his chapel included Roscoe and Currie.¹² In Hull, Rev. John Beatson also delivered a sermon on abolition to a congregation of Protestant dissenters. In Bristol, Robert Hall, tutor at the local Baptist College, wrote anonymous articles in favour of abolition while a fellow Baptist, Robert Robinson of Cambridge, urged abolitionism through a sermon.¹³ Dissenting ministers, and members of the clergy more generally, were crucially important supporters: they lent local committees respectability and provided them with a channel for transmitting information with authority.

⁹ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols. (1808), vol. I, chapters 14 to 19 ; J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery, 1787-1807* (Manchester, 1995), p. 128 and chapter 4, *passim*.

¹⁰ Samuel Bradburn, *An Address to the People called Methodists; concerning the criminality of encouraging slavery* (Manchester, 1792).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹² R. D. Thornton, *James Currie: The Entire Stranger and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 142.

¹³ Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998), vol. II, p. 441.

Non-conformist denominations also provided an alternative channel for mass mobilisation. The Meeting for Sufferings sub-committee was funded by donations from monthly and quarterly meetings and sent its own petitions to Parliament in 1783, 1788, 1792 and 1798.¹⁴ Provincial Baptists had attacked the trade before the London Society was formed: in 1783, the Norfolk and Suffolk Congregational Association resolved that the slave trade should be regulated or abolished.¹⁵ The General Baptists quickly gave their assistance to the London Society.¹⁶ Baptists in Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottingham and in the Western Baptist Association were some of the first subscribers to the society.¹⁷ In 1792, the majority of Scottish petitions were organised through the presbyteries. The abolition movement also received early support from an obscure religious sect, the Swedenborgians, the most prominent London member of which was Carl Bernhard Wadström whose *Observations on the Slave Trade* the London Society printed in 1789.¹⁸ How extensive organised denominational support may have been is obscured. Some dissenters, such as the 'Protestant dissenters' of Devizes and the dissenting ministers of Northumberland, sent separate petitions to Parliament in the first campaign,¹⁹ but many more joined with other groups to support a cause which was essentially non-sectarian. In 1792, for example, the Methodists of Manchester signed the local inhabitants petition 'deeming it a less pompous way than sending a distinct petition of our own.'²⁰ Nevertheless, non-conformist religious affiliation clearly provided a channel for mobilisation.²¹

Another point to note is that dissenters had a tradition of cross-denominational co-operation which stemmed from their status as second-class citizens. The campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts united groups of local dissenters in collaborative activity. In Liverpool, the abolitionists were involved in the repeal movement, through which they encountered members of the Warrington Academy and the Manchester abolitionists.²² These connections extended to the metropolitan centre

¹⁴ *House of Commons Journals* for the relevant years.

¹⁵ Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. II, p. 441.

¹⁶ The London abolitionists sent copies of Clarkson's *Summary View*, circular letters and lists of subscribers to Dan Taylor, the founder of the New Connexion and one of the secretaries of the annual meeting. 'Minute Books of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade,' BM Add. MSS 21,254, first of 3 vols. (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Abolition Society, I'): 22 June 1787.

¹⁷ Printed list of subscribers to the Abolition Society, n.d., Society of Friends Library, London. As this list contains around 500 names, it is either the second or third printed list and dates from before August 1788, c.f. MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: May 1787 to August 1788.

¹⁸ Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists - London's Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786-1791* (Liverpool, 1994), p. 9.

¹⁹ *House of Commons Journals*, 21 February 1788, 6 February 1789.

²⁰ Samuel Bradburn, *Address to the People called Methodist*, p. 10.

²¹ Quaker epistles encouraged petitioning in 1788. Thompson-Clarkson collection, Society of Friends Library, London, 3 vols. Vol. 2: Letter from W. Birkbeck to James Phillips, 16 February 1788.

²² Mark Jones, 'The Nature of the Liverpool Movement for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1787-1807,' BA thesis, University of York (1995); G. M. Ditchfield, 'The Campaign in Lancashire and

of the campaign: the country members of the 1786-90 repeal committee included Thomas Butterworth Bayley and Samuel Shore, key figures among the Manchester and Sheffield abolitionists.²³ Through these exertions, dissenters met and maintained contact with other dissenters both locally and throughout the country, extending contact between groups of provincial abolitionists.²⁴

However, as *The Times* noted in 1788, 'it is as unjust as it is false, to impute to the *Dissenters* the sole cry against NEGRO SLAVERY.'²⁵ Anglican clergymen and members of the Church of England also played prominent roles in many committees, especially in areas where dissent was traditionally less strong or only more recently established. Clarkson and Wilberforce drew on their own Anglican connections to rally abolitionist support in the provinces. Archdeacon Joseph Plymley's efforts were extensive and successful. Rev. Henry Dannett of Liverpool was one of three authors who condemned Rev. Raymund Harris's scriptural defence of slavery.²⁶ Rev. James Wilkinson, the vicar of Sheffield, was elected chairman of his local committee.²⁷ Nor should we forget that the Universities gave their support early in the campaign: collections were raised in several colleges at Cambridge.²⁸ Obtaining Anglican support was crucially important as these men had influence within local government, a fact remembered by Clarkson while trying to raise support during his tour of 1823-24. Anglicans also wrote several of the most important pamphlets produced during the years of the first campaign. The open letter to the treasurer of the Abolition Society written by Robert Boucher Nicholls, the Dean of Middleham, was second only to Clarkson's *Summary View* in terms of circulation and may have exceeded it through its reproduction in the provincial press. Beilby Porteus's sermon, when Bishop of Chester was widely circulated by both the Quaker sub-committee and the London Society.

Nevertheless, many Anglicans were reticent about taking up a campaign which mobilised popular pressure and was closely associated with dissenters. Clarkson was warned at the outset by the Bishop of Bangor 'not to make himself so conspicuous in the subject of the Abolition... [as] it wou'd hurt his interest very much and prevent his

Cheshire for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-1790,' *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, No. 126 (1968).

²³ Thomas W. Davis (ed.), *Committees for Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, London Records Society (1978). Biographical appendix.

²⁴ G. M. Ditchfield, 'Manchester College and anti-slavery,' pp. 185-224, in Barbara Smith (ed.) *Truth, Liberty, Equality - Essays celebrating Two Hundred Years of Manchester College* (Oxford, 1986).

²⁵ *The Times*, 8 February 1788.

²⁶ The others were William Roscoe and James Ramsay.

²⁷ *York Courant*, 29 January 1788.

²⁸ Printed list of subscribers, *op.cit.*.

rising in the church.' He again came into conflict with another Bishop, Dr. Butler, the Bishop of Hereford, over the abolition question.²⁹ Although Bishops were less likely to become directly involved in the abolitionist movement because of their constitutional position, five subscribed to the London Society in 1788.³⁰ Further down the Anglican hierarchy, one can see a more general willingness to participate. Plymley organised a petition from the Archdeacons in Shropshire in 1792 which was signed by the general clergy: one of the three archdeacons, Leigh, was unwilling to sign until many members of the clergy had signed their names.³¹ The clergy frequently appeared as named groups among general petitioners: fifteen percent of the petitions of 1788 were of this kind.³² Even then, the full involvement of members of the clergy is hidden. Many will have signed inhabitants or other general petitions: the Shropshire county petition of 1792, for example, was signed by 464 men, 'fifty seven of whom were clergymen.'³³ Many also subscribed to local committees: the Edinburgh committee was in contact with a clergyman 'whose whole possessions is only a living of sixty pounds a year, [who] sent five guinea to the Committee.' (They returned four guineas to him 'with very full acknowledgement of his goodness.')³⁴ Of course, much depended on how far local members of the clergy were latitudinarian. Evangelicals were more inclined to associate with dissenters: William Burgh, the precentor of York Minster, was a fringe member of the Clapham Sect and a member of the Quaker-led York committee. Clergymen, at the lower end of the Anglican hierarchy, were more regularly involved in cross-denominational efforts, such as poor relief. Furthermore, their political position was less constitutionally important than that of bishops. Despite these factors favouring evangelical and clergy participation, abolitionism still 'cut across Anglican loyalties.'³⁵

Nevertheless, Anglican support was perhaps more fickle than most. Due to their political role, as agents of the Established Church, Anglicans were typically more conservative than dissenters. The campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts proved partly divisive. This was followed by a period of prolonged popular radicalism in the early 1790s which also appeared to threaten the status quo. Many prominent Anglicans fled abolitionism: both Burgh and Mason, despite being active in the York committee, rapidly distanced themselves from provincial pressure for abolition in Yorkshire after the petitions of 1792, following the news of the excesses

²⁹ MSS Plymley diaries, book 3.

³⁰ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

³¹ MSS Plymley diaries, book 3. The other Archdeacons were Clive and Plymley himself.

³² Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

³³ MSS Plymley diaries, books 6 and 7.

³⁴ MSS Plymley diaries, book 4.

³⁵ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

of the French Revolution.³⁶ As supporters of the constitution, Anglicans were far more cautious in the early 1790s than the dissenters whose hopes for civil and religious toleration had been thwarted once again.³⁷ Anglicans were also set opposite anti-corporation groups which attracted non-conformist supporters. Significantly the Church of England did not take an official stand against the slave trade, unlike the Quakers, General Baptists and increasingly the Methodists. In 1792, George Harrison made the first of two appeals to the prelates of the Church of England to obtain their official support.³⁸ Yet the lack of official word, and the reticence of some bishops, may have dissuaded Anglicans from becoming involved in the campaign, as well as denying the abolitionists access to the largest independent network through which they could mobilise support.³⁹

If we look past the religious affiliations of local committee members to their occupations we can appreciate the predominance of middle-class activists. 'Mercantile, commercial and professional elements of the middle stratum with a sprinkling of manufacturers and, at a more local level, tradesmen, artisans and dissenting ministers were the sort of people who were active.'⁴⁰ A cross-section of supporters, based on the Exeter subscription lists of 1788, shows that a quarter of subscribers were shopkeepers, another quarter were small manufacturers, while one sixth were merchants.⁴¹ A significant proportion of those remaining were ministers of religion, both Anglicans and non-conformists, whose involvement has already been noted. These ratios differed greatly from place to place: as E. M. Hunt has observed, the preponderance of merchants in Manchester was not reflected more generally across the north of England.⁴² Nevertheless, the same occupations reappear: William Tuke in York was a wholesale grocer, Benjamin Kaye in Leeds a mercer, and William Rathbone a Liverpool merchant. As Oldfield notes, abolitionism 'penetrated deep into the middling ranks,' although many may have been closer to artisans in status. The petitions of 1792 reveal that the ship-owners of North and South Shields, 'Persons interested in the Manufactory of Earthen Ware in Staffordshire' and the Cutlers of

³⁶ R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 5 vols. (1838), vol I, p. 66, 222, 227, 379, 380; vol II, p. 145, 359; John W. Draper, *William Mason: A Study in Eighteenth Century Culture* (New York, 1924), p. 99.

³⁷ Draper, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

³⁸ [George Harrison], *Address to the Right Reverend the Prelates of England and Wales on the subject of the slave trade* (1792).

³⁹ This is particularly important when one considers the repression of popular movements after 1793. Canvassing Anglican support may have allowed mobilisation to continue with some respectability.

⁴⁰ David Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-slavery, 1780-1860* (1991), p. 94.

⁴¹ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

⁴² Hunt, 'North of England Agitation for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1780-1800,' MA Thesis, University of Manchester (1959), chapter 4; See also Oldfield's comparison of Exeter and Nottingham, *op.cit.*, pp. 130-131.

Sheffield petitioned.⁴³ Judging from the large number of inns used to hold petitions for signature in 1788 and 1792, one may reasonably suspect that many pub landlords supported the cause. Moreover, the petitions of 1792, as we have seen, drew strongly on provincial radicalism with which artisans were particularly associated.

Many abolitionists, through their businesses, could provide the movement with practical aid. The Gurney, Pease, Backhouse, Lloyd and Hoare families were involved in banking and all offered their banks to local committees for the purpose of organising subscriptions. Shopkeepers offered their shops as collection points for subscriptions and some housed petitions for signature. More important again were printers and newspaper editors whom Clarkson tried to win over to the cause. Wheeler, editor of the *Manchester Chronicle*, subscribed to the local committee.⁴⁴ Edward Rushton was, for a brief period during the campaign, editor of the *Liverpool Herald*.⁴⁵ Moreover, editors could remain loyal to the cause for years to come: when Cowdroy moved from Chester to Manchester, his new paper, the *Manchester Gazette*, remained open to the abolitionists.⁴⁶ Booksellers were also useful supporters. As Borsay notes, the provincial book trade was able to capitalise on a system of supply, demand and advertising which had been established by early local newspapers. By the time of the first abolition campaign, booksellers across the country were in contact with each other and London.⁴⁷ Clarkson encouraged provincial supporters to establish and maintain contact with local booksellers to ensure the quick and easy distribution of pamphlets.⁴⁸ Tradesmen closely associated with this line of business, such as stationers and bookbinders, were occasionally among the lists of subscribers and committee members also.⁴⁹ These individuals enabled the abolitionists to receive, print and distribute tracts with great ease.

A noticeable number of supporters came from the 'new professions,' principally doctors and lawyers. These men lay at the heart of cultural life in the provinces, frequently dominating Literary and Philosophical societies and working to improve

⁴³ Separate petitions were also received from the weavers and the skimmers and glovers of Glasgow.

⁴⁴ *Manchester Mercury*, 13 March 1792. Crouse and Stevenson, the printers of the *Norfolk Chronicle*, were also in contact with the London Committee. MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 23 September 1788.

⁴⁵ William Shepherd, *Life of Edward Rushton* (Liverpool, 1824)

⁴⁶ Clarkson, *History*, I, p. 370.

⁴⁷ Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 131-133.

⁴⁸ Wedgwood collection, on deposit at the Keele University Archive, E32/24738.B. Letter: Thomas Clarkson (circular) to Josiah Wedgwood, 9 January 1792.

⁴⁹ Matthew Falkner, treasurer of the Manchester society, was a stationer with a shop in the market place. *Manchester Mercury*, 5 January 1790.

facilities for education, cultural appreciation and public health.⁵⁰ In Liverpool these connections were particularly strong and had a noticeable overlap with abolitionists. William Roscoe, a lawyer by training, was instrumental in a great many public projects: the Athenaeum, botanical gardens and the Royal Institution, a forerunner of the University of Liverpool.⁵¹ Dr. James Currie was greatly involved in the Liverpool Infirmary and helped to establish a lunatic asylum in 1789. He drew on many of his medical colleagues, including Dr. Binns, another abolitionist, to pack the numbers of the Liverpool Literary Society which he founded with Roscoe in 1783.⁵² Increasingly, these men came together to define polite middle-class culture by forming bodies which reflected their interests and pursuits. The connection between Literary and Philosophical Societies and abolitionism was particularly strong. 'Lit and Phils' allowed individuals on the margins of society to become involved in matters of wider social importance. Here, in the newsrooms, libraries and halls of large towns such as Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, the business of benevolence could be conducted by like-minded individuals drawn from respectable but often excluded groups. Physicians, lawyers, the wealthier merchants and traders, many of whom were dissenters and thus excluded from local government, established themselves as parallel centres for public works. While nominally a-political, such groups represented an alternative to the traditional power base. The Liverpool 'Lit and Phil' was a bastion of liberal and anti-corporation thought: its members were prominent in the campaigns for religious toleration, improved education, political reform, freedom of trade, peace with France and the abolition of the slave trade.⁵³ In Birmingham, Manchester, Derby and later Newcastle, 'Lit and Phils' also encouraged the discussion of general topics among their members, including the slave trade.⁵⁴ The Manchester anti-slave trade committee shared half its members with the Literary and Philosophical Society. There is also evidence to suggest that the two groups were mutually reinforcing.⁵⁵ Moreover, these societies were in frequent contact with one another - the Manchester Society attracted the attendance and membership of William Roscoe and William Rathbone, the besieged campaigners of Liverpool - once more extending the network of independent communications between abolitionists.

⁵⁰ Roy Porter, 'Science, provincial culture and public opinion in Enlightenment England,' in Peter Borsay (ed.) *The eighteenth-century town: a reader in English urban history, 1688-1820* (1990).

⁵¹ G. W. Matthews, *William Roscoe* (n.d.), *passim*.

⁵² W. W. Currie, *Memoirs and Life of Dr. Currie* (Liverpool, 1805) see *passim*. for Currie's local works.

⁵³ R. D. Thornton, *James Currie: The Entire Stranger and Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 163.

⁵⁴ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1997), p. 513.

⁵⁵ Four members of the Anti-Slave Trade committee joined the Literary and Philosophical Society between 1788 and 1792. Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, p. 119.

The important point to note is that abolitionism drew on pre-existing affiliations at the local level. The movement was transposed on to established friendships, business endeavours and philanthropic activities many of which extended beyond their immediate area. This is crucially important to our understanding of the abolitionist network. In reinterpreting the role of the London Society, Oldfield has attempted to impose one framework of activity, 'top down,' on the fabric of provincial abolitionism. 'Significantly,' he writes, 'there is no evidence that local committees corresponded with one another.'⁵⁶ Firstly, it is worth questioning this in light of the Manchester committee's use of the provincial press in December 1787, especially as Drescher bases his interpretation of popular mobilisation upon it. Secondly, it is clear that London did not monopolise organisation or information. Committees were made up of individuals who were in contact with others and discussed the progress of the anti-slave trade campaign, whether as members of a local committee or not. In fact, the London Society *encouraged* the interaction of country committees: in mid-June 1788, it asked neighbouring committees to meet to divide the area between them to ensure a blanket canvass of Great Britain.⁵⁷ If metropolitan orders were as important and influential as Oldfield suggests, we should expect committees to have been in contact.

A brief recourse to the diaries of Katherine Plymley reveal the extent of connections between provincial abolitionists and the transmission of information on the progress of the cause between them. The Plymleys were friends with two important abolitionist families, the Wedgwoods of North Staffordshire and the Darwins of Shrewsbury (and later Derby). Both families were related by marriage: Charles Darwin, the great Victorian scientist, had Erasmus Darwin as his paternal and Josiah Wedgwood I as his maternal grandfathers, both of whom were members of the Birmingham Lunar Society, the most celebrated 'Lit and Phil.'⁵⁸ The Plymleys visited the Wedgwoods in nearby Etruria while Joseph maintained a correspondence with Erasmus Darwin who, in 1788, had helped to found the Derby abolitionist committee.⁵⁹ In 1792, when Plymley heard that the Derby Committee were unable to find time to petition, he volunteered to visit the town to raise the petition himself. Eventually, the task fell to another friend, Dr. Baker, a member of the London Committee who lived closer to Derby.⁶⁰ Joseph also knew Houlbrooke, a member of the Edinburgh Committee who sent detailed accounts of the state of the cause in Scotland during the early months of

⁵⁶ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

⁵⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 10 June 1788.

⁵⁸ Michael White and John Gribbin, *Darwin - A Life in Science* (1996), chapter 1, pp. 1-26.

⁵⁹ MSS Plymley diaries, books 1 to 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, book 7: 9 March 1792.

1792. As a result of receiving the Edinburgh group's abridgement of Clarkson's abstract of evidence, Plymley ordered its printing in Shrewsbury.⁶¹ Meanwhile, through Plymley's tour of the border counties of mid-Wales in 1792, more supporters were brought into this network. Through the London Committee, Joseph Plymley was also introduced to Richard Reynolds, the Quaker industrialist of Coalbrookdale, and Thomas Gisbourne, the Anglican clergyman and friend of Wilberforce. Correspondence between them continued and, through these contacts, the Plymleys appear to have encountered more abolitionists in Staffordshire.⁶² Even from this brief survey (and it need proceed no further) it can be seen that personal connections between abolitionists, some of which emerged from the campaign, provided another channel through which information was transmitted and acted upon.

PETITIONERS

In 1787, the London Society focused on establishing a network of influential country correspondents. In the following year (and again, though to a lesser extent, in 1792), these individuals proved crucially important in raising petitions to Parliament. In the process, many correspondents helped to form local committees, auxiliary societies of the London committee, which undertook all matters principally relating to the petition and its presentation to Parliament. In the months after the 1788 petition campaign, the London Society decided to encourage the formation of these associations for the purpose of distributing information and raising subscriptions, lobbying their MPs, collecting evidence against the slave trade and once again raising petitions when asked to do so. In this section, we will look at the mechanics of these undertakings and thus how provincial abolitionists made an essential contribution to the national movement through petitions. But in later sections we will also see how they assisted the London Society outside the isolated months of mass mobilisation during 1788 and 1792. We will also see how the London Society dictated the nature and timing of provincial activity.

The task for which many local committees were formed was the raising of petitions. The way in which petitions were raised differed according to the type adopted. Petitions from corporations were agreed to in closed session. Similarly, where the franchise was restricted, such as a petition from the clergy or the 'principal

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, book 6: 24 February to 5 March 1792.

⁶² *Ibid.*, book 1: 20-21 October 1791; Book 2: 21-22 October 1791; Book 3: 22-30 October 1791.

inhabitants,' efforts were conducted through lines of personal acquaintance. Charles Collins in Swansea wrote a petition and sent it around for the signatures of 'most of the principal inhabitants.'⁶³ Canvassing for signatures in this way allowed abolitionists to dictate who signed,⁶⁴ but most county, borough or town petitions were public affairs. Each began with a requisition for a public meeting from a number of prominent citizens. Drescher has identified twenty-seven public meetings during the 1788 campaign: the total in 1792 was far higher.⁶⁵ In county towns, the public meeting could serve the dual purpose of approving and signing petitions from the inhabitants of the county and the town simultaneously, indicating that this small number of public meetings may hide a larger total of petitions.⁶⁶

The business of procuring a requisition was usually a formality. The mayor of Shrewsbury, Mr. Eydon, was a member of the town's abolition committee and agreed to hold a public meeting but still required a requisition.⁶⁷ Of course, a public meeting was not always guaranteed. The mayor of Hertford refused to allow the inhabitants to use the town hall while a petition from Penryn was considerably delayed because the Mayor was 'friendly to the trade.'⁶⁸ However, requisitions could apply pressure on unwilling individuals to comply by force of peer example. In Shropshire, for instance, Plymley overcame the reticence of one Archdeacon by obtaining signatures from the clergy.⁶⁹ In Leicestershire, fifty clergymen overruled the wishes of another timid Archdeacon.⁷⁰ Such tactics were not limited in use to persuading high-ranking Anglican clergymen: when Plymley faced opposition from Forrester, a former MP, he 'knew there were many gentlemen of large property who were burgesses of Wenlock whom he could depend on as being well affected to the cause... When Mr. Forrester saw their names to a letter of requisition he was convinced he would not chose to oppose their wishes.'⁷¹ These examples suggest that courting the respectable was a crucially important part of the business of petitioning.

⁶³ Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. II: Letter from Charles Collins to James Phillips, 21 February 1788. His efforts do not appear to have been more public than this.

⁶⁴ George Fox in Falmouth reported that 'none but [those signatures of] creditable townsmen and Inhabitants were requested.' Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. II: Letter from George C. Fox to James Phillips, 22 February 1788.

⁶⁵ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 75.

⁶⁶ MSS Plymley diaries, book 5: 17 February 1792.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Book 4.

⁶⁸ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 108; Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. II: Letter from George C. Fox to James Phillips, 22 February 1788.

⁶⁹ MSS Plymley diaries, book 3.

⁷⁰ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

⁷¹ MSS Plymley diaries, book 4.

In these cases, only one person was needed to initiate the petitioning process. Thomas Thompson's presence at Dorchester 'where he being well-known [had] considerable influence' was enough to procure a petition.⁷² Rev. Plymley approached his mayor, wrote a requisition himself and 'carried [it] about with him to get sign'd as occasion offer'd,' to prevent any delay.⁷³ Evidence also points to the role played by country correspondents, in this respect. W. Birkbeck toured Dorset and organised petitions from Dorchester, Bridport, Shaftesbury and three other towns.⁷⁴ Plymley appears to have written a template petition which he distributed to several friends in Shropshire and Montgomeryshire.⁷⁵ William Mason also offered his assistance in raising petitions from across Yorkshire while Thomas Walker sent a petition from Bolton as well as that from Manchester to the London Committee. Rev. George Walker of Nottingham even wrote to a friend in Yarmouth, 120 miles away, to ask 'why has not Yarmouth joined the national voice in the cause of human liberty?... It is not too late to come in for your share of the honour.'⁷⁶ Similarly, the lack of a country correspondent in Hertford gave Clarkson 'little hope of receiving petitions from there.'⁷⁷ Again, it should be noted that Quakers were prominent: at least one-third of those correspondents who sent petitions to be approved by the London Committee in 1792 were members of the Society of Friends, and they represented one-half of those English correspondents listed.⁷⁸ There was also a high degree of continuity between the two petition campaigns in terms of personnel: Mr. Corser of Shropshire was 'prominent' in the petition from Bridgenorth in 1788 and was thus 'quite to be depended on' again in 1792.⁷⁹ The network of correspondents established by the London Society worked effectively to procure petitions during both campaigns.

Public meetings provided the focus for an increasing number of petitions: far fewer petitions in 1792, and fewer still from the 1820s, were organised privately. Such meetings were social events, usually open to all. The occasion of the visit of a London dignitary, like Clarkson or Dickson, might occasion a meeting of subscribers or a public dinner. Speeches too were made to remind those assembled of their Christian

⁷² Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. II: Letter from W. Birkbeck to James Phillips, 16 February 1788.

⁷³ MSS Plymley diaries, book 4.

⁷⁴ The first two did indeed send petitions to the Commons. Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. II: Letter from W. Birkbeck to James Phillips, 16 February 1788.

⁷⁵ Over one night and one morning he wrote petitions for Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Bridgenorth, the franchises of Wenlock and the county. MSS Plymley diaries, books 4 and 5, esp. 14 February 1792 (book 5).

⁷⁶ Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. II: Letter from George Walker to William Manning, 6 June 1788.

⁷⁷ MSS Plymley diaries, book 6.

⁷⁸ Based on MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III, for the first three months of 1792.

⁷⁹ MSS Plymley diaries, book 4.

duty and to collect subscriptions. Following each speech, a resolution was usually made (one which had been tabled and prepared in advance) and typically became the basis for the petition. In some cases, a number of drafts of a petition might be presented and spirits occasionally ran high over the merits and appeals of competing drafts: William Mason witnessed the squabbles over three draft petitions presented to a meeting in Sheffield in 1792. Mason also disliked the 'revolutionary terms' of a petition proposed at Rotherham.⁸⁰ Local committees paid close attention to the wording of their petitions, perhaps explaining why so many during the first and second years of petitioning, sent drafts to the London Society for their approval.⁸¹ The *Sheffield Register* made particular note of the language used in the inhabitants petition of 1788: 'We are proud to say that Sheffield has held out the very properest [*sic*] language to ensure success. - Becoming modesty and cool argument are the best ingredients in a dispassionate and honest appeal to the wisdom of a legislature.'⁸²

Completed petitions were then made available for signature. Again, the extent of the petition's circulation depended on the type adopted. For county petitions, sheets of parchment headed by a draft of the petition were sent to various parts of the county for signature and were later collected. By contrast, the typical inhabitants petition in 1792 took between two and four weeks to be raised, signed and presented.⁸³ General inhabitants petitions were left open for signature at a number of public locations, principally the town hall. Copies of the Manchester petition of 1788 were left for signature at the offices of the *Manchester Mercury*, a stationer's, a hotel and ten inns.⁸⁴ In 1792, the Methodists of Manchester allowed their communion table to be used to hold the petition.⁸⁵ Inhabitants petitions were truly open to the inhabitants, lodged in places of easy and frequent access. In 1788, the Cutler's Hall in Sheffield was made available for their trades petition.⁸⁶

The business of raising petitions indicates the need for supporters in possession of a degree of influence. Here, the country correspondents were of crucial importance, especially the Quakers who are extremely well represented as petitioning correspondents in the records of the London Society. It also shows the importance of public events in

⁸⁰ Wilberforce, *Life*, vol. I, pp. 339-440.

⁸¹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 22 January 1788 - 5 February 1788.

⁸² *Sheffield Register*, 26 January 1788.

⁸³ Thompson-Clarkson collection: Letter from Charles Collins to James Phillips, 21 February 1788. Timing of petitions based on cross-referencing public meetings with the presentation of the finished petition to the Commons, using local newspaper reports and *House of Commons Journals*.

⁸⁴ *Manchester Mercury*, 1 December 1787 *et seq.* The same can be seen in Nottingham, Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

⁸⁵ Bradburn, *Address to the People called Methodists*, p. 10.

⁸⁶ *Sheffield Register*, 26 January 1788.

the education of public opinion and provincial activity. Between 1788 and 1792, abolitionist activity was conducted on a far smaller scale, with the exception of occasional subscribers meetings.

LOBBYISTS

Historians have tended to overlook the work undertaken by provincial abolitionists to lobby their MPs on behalf of the Abolition Society. Local supporters were frequently asked to encourage their MPs to attend Parliamentary hearings, to support abolitionist motions and to vote against half-measures. The first circular letter of the London Society asked correspondents to influence their representatives. Abolitionists were also involved in extracting pledges from MPs and seeing that they were upheld. On one level, provincial abolitionists might simply repeat the pledges of national politicians thus extending the substance of the initial pledge.⁸⁷ But some abolitionists also took it upon themselves to obtain direct promises of support from their representatives. Once given, abolitionists remained watchful of their candidates. In Scarborough, the news of the local representative's defence of the slave trade in 1792 led to a motion censuring him.⁸⁸ Abolitionists therefore extended the notion of political representation by keeping their MPs to their word, an approach which perhaps owed much to the campaign's joint membership with its Association and SCI forerunners.⁸⁹ But abolitionists would also approve of their MP's humanitarian endeavours: freeholders at Olney congratulated their MP for his advocacy of abolition.⁹⁰

Supporters in Nottingham resolved to 'use every legal and constitutional mode' at their disposal which, for the enfranchised, could extend to withholding their votes.⁹¹ During the general election of 1790, the Manchester Committee urged all fellow supporters across the country to ensure that only abolitionist candidates were elected.

⁸⁷ When Wilberforce, Pitt, Fox, Montagu and Smith each resolved in 1791 not to relinquish their appeals until the slave was abolished, they were heartily congratulated by the London Society. These pledges and thanks were reiterated in abolitionist meetings in the months of renewed agitation. Abolition Society circular, begins: 'At a Committee of the Society for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade...' (dated 26 April 1791).

⁸⁸ Letter quoted in *York Courant*, 1 May 1792.

⁸⁹ *Manchester Mercury*, 5 January 1790.

⁹⁰ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

⁹¹ Nottingham Society circular, begins: 'At a Respectable Meeting of the Inhabitants of this town...' (Nottingham, 21 December 1791).

‘We cannot reasonably expect a steady adherence to the dictates of public virtue, in opposition to the temptations of private interest, from those members of Parliament who shall hesitate to support the common rights of mankind and the plainest principles of justice and equality by opposing the continuance of the African slave trade.’⁹²

The increasing political radicalism in Manchester may have been the root cause of this appeal but it is noteworthy that on 11 June, the Quaker Yearly Meeting and the Meeting for Sufferings, not known for their political radicalism, asked Friends not ‘to countenance in any manner, the election of such as are known enemies’ to the abolition.⁹³

The threat which abolitionists posed was believed to be of very real consequence. *The Times* suggested that one MP would face considerable censure:

‘He [Sir Charles Bunbury] has... been inattentive in the appointment of Saturday the 22nd Instant, for the meeting of the County of Suffolk, on the business of the Slave Trade, for as that day was unluckily situated between Good Friday and Sunday, the distant Clergy were prevented from attending the meeting. This business will not help Sir Charles at the next general election.’⁹⁴

In Tewkesbury, the enfranchised inhabitants forced Captain William Dowdeswell to produce a declaration ‘To the Independent Freemen and Burgesses of the Borough of Tewkesbury,’ pledging his support for abolition.⁹⁵ How extensively pledging was undertaken were is unknown, but the *Register* in 1792 noted that

‘the Inhabitants of several places, which have petitioned Parliament for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, have instructed their Members to support it by their votes. Others have positively told them, that if they do not vote for the Abolition, they have no farther claim to their countenance at a future election. In many places parties are forming to support those only in the next Sessions as their Representatives, who will do their utmost to exterminate this greatest of all human evils.’⁹⁶

Thus, enfranchised abolitionists truly attempted to use all the constitutional means in their power to effect the abolition of the slave trade, reinforcing the London Society’s lobbying efforts at the local level.

⁹² *Manchester Mercury*, 5 January 1790.

⁹³ Quoted in Jennings, *Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade*, p. 59.

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 25 March 1788.

⁹⁵ *The Register*, 2 April 1792.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

SUBSCRIBERS

Provincial abolitionists made an important contribution as subscribers and in the raising of subscriptions. Again, the presence of a formalised committee was not of paramount importance. Subscriptions in York and Manchester, for example, were organised before the appointment of a local auxiliary. In many cases, the Quakers provided the impetus and the important assurance that subscriptions would be in safe hands: their honesty and reliability gave people the confidence to subscribe to a cause without an appointed officiating body.⁹⁷ William Tuke arranged for subscriptions to be received by both the York banks and would take subscriptions at his own grocers shop.⁹⁸ Benjamin Kaye, a Quaker clothier of Leeds, also offered to receive subscriptions.⁹⁹ Members of the Society of Friends played a prominent role in the expansion of the 'country banks' in the later eighteenth century and many, including the Gurneys of Norwich and the Pease family of Darlington, used their own banks to support abolitionism.¹⁰⁰ The first report of the Abolition Society, issued in January 1788 before the formation of most temporary committees, showed that subscriptions since May 1787, mostly from individuals, fell just short of £1,400 ~~pounds~~.¹⁰¹

Little evidence remains of the way in which subscriptions were raised. By June 1788, even the London Society had little idea of the number or identities of its own subscribers nationally: such matters were dealt with by the local committees who were asked to send details to London.¹⁰² The records of local committees, if kept, have not survived but it seems clear that family connections played an important role. The names of several members of the same family frequently appear in subscription lists and donations from the wives and daughters of committee members are not uncommon.¹⁰³ Donations from the general public could be received at local banks or by the members of the committee: Manchester subscribers in 1792 could deposit their subscription with any one of twenty-three individuals.¹⁰⁴ The metropolitan banks of

⁹⁷ James Walvin, *The Quakers - Money and Morals* (1997), esp. chapter 4, for an account of the Quaker reputation.

⁹⁸ One donation of £30 from Lord Galway was received by York abolitionists as early as October 1787 although the York Society was not formed until January 1788. *The Times*, 17 October 1787.

⁹⁹ *Manchester Mercury*, 6 November 1787 (subscriptions in collection), 25 December 1787 (intended formation of committee); *York Courant*, 22 January 1788; 5 February 1788.

¹⁰⁰ Walvin, *The Quakers*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰¹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 15 January 1788.

¹⁰² MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 24 June 1788.

¹⁰³ See, for example, subscription list in *Manchester Mercury*, 6 November 1787, which contains the wives of several male abolitionists.

¹⁰⁴ *Manchester Mercury*, 13 March 1792.

the Quakers Lloyd and Hoare received subscriptions from across the country but generally the collection of subscriptions was devolved on to the provinces.¹⁰⁵ There may have been local canvasses which later became common, especially among ladies anti-slavery associations in the 1820s. In October 1788, the London Society asked their secretary to wait on every subscriber in the capital and its vicinity to apply for the renewal of their subscription.¹⁰⁶ In York, the abolitionists canvassed generally: 'some of the principal people in the city and [members] of the clergy go about with us for signatures with a warmth of zeal, which is wonderful.'¹⁰⁷ Women were also active in encouraging donations, particularly in Manchester. At the beginning of November 1787, an anonymous individual, writing in the *Mercury*, argued that men of business had to be awoken to their benevolent duty by the compassion and sincerity of female example. The letter also listed the names of thirteen women, each of whom donated one guinea, around £80 in modern terms.¹⁰⁸ The contribution made by the ladies of Manchester was significant: at least sixty-eight of the three hundred Manchester subscribers were women, almost a quarter of the total subscribers from the town. Indeed, their subscription was noted as 'the most auspicious occurrence in this business' by the *Mercury*.¹⁰⁹

In total, women accounted for around ten percent of the subscribers listed by the London Society in August 1788.¹¹⁰ This list was compiled from the records of donations received by local committees and belies significant regional variation. In Manchester and Exeter women represented about twenty-two percent of subscribers and in Plymouth and York fourteen percent, but women represented only eight percent of subscribers in Nottingham and fewer again in Bristol, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham. Women did not contribute to the subscription at Leicester.¹¹¹ It is interesting to note that perhaps only between a quarter and a third of female subscribers were related to male subscribers. Thus the majority took the decision to subscribe independently, showing themselves 'able and willing to represent themselves.'¹¹² This, of course, reflects the general impression that we have of the social background of abolitionist subscribers. Among those independently-minded

¹⁰⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 24 June 1788.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 7 October 1788. The *Manchester Mercury*, however, referred to subscriptions as 'unsolicited contributions.' *Manchester Mercury*, 11 December 1787.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from William Tuke to Samuel Grubb, 3 February 1788, quoted in E. M. Hunt, 'North of England agitation,' chapter 4.

¹⁰⁸ To obtain a rough estimate of the equivalent modern value of subscriptions, I have multiplied the eighteenth century figure by eighty. See 'A note on money' in Vincent Caretta (ed.), Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (1995), pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

¹⁰⁹ *Manchester Mercury*, 11 December 1787.

¹¹⁰ Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery - The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (1992), p. 17.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 212 *fn* 48; Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

¹¹² Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 138; Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

women identified by Oldfield there was a milliner, a grocer and a schoolmistress.¹¹³ It must also be added that men probably subscribed as heads of household and that these, and the numerous anonymous donations received, doubtless conceal the extent of donations from women and perhaps children. The financial participation of women in the campaign may have been much higher.

The subscriptions of women were determined by denominational, socio-economic and political factors as Midgley has observed. In Manchester, female worshippers at the Cross Street Unitarian chapel were well-represented in the subscription as were the wives of the Quaker abolitionists.¹¹⁴ The appeal for female involvement also reflects the political radicalism of the Manchester abolitionists and local Unitarians. The first appeal to the ladies of Manchester opened with a justification of their involvement which idealised the spread of female influence beyond the home:

‘If any public Interference will at any Time become the Fair Sex, if their Names are ever to be mentioned with Honour beyond the Boundaries of their Family, and the Circle of their Connections, it can only be, when a public Opportunity is given for the Exertion of those Qualities which are peculiarly possessed by the most amiable Part of Creation - the Qualities of Humanity, Benevolence and Compassion.’¹¹⁵

Again, this appeal may have owed much to Unitarian ideas on the public role of women.¹¹⁶ However, there is no evidence to suggest that women sat on local committees although subscription was usually the only stipulated requirement.

It must be noted that the average donation of one guinea, while typical for causes of this kind, may have precluded working class support. But there are cases where donations were received from groups. Religious denominations, for example, were frequently noted. Baptists from several counties subscribed to the London Society and a subscription may have been organised through the secretaries of the General Baptists from as early as June 1787.¹¹⁷ In January 1792, a York newspaper reported that a general subscription was circulating throughout the Methodist congregations.¹¹⁸ Collections were also made at meetings and following sermons.¹¹⁹ These group

¹¹³ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

¹¹⁴ Midgley's suggestion that the rising commercial elite of Manchester may have encouraged their increasingly leisured womenfolk to undertake philanthropic exertions out of considerations of respectability is convincing. Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

¹¹⁵ *Manchester Mercury*, 6 November 1787.

¹¹⁶ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 12 June 1787, 22 June 1787.

¹¹⁸ *York Courant*, 3 January 1792

¹¹⁹ The Baptists of Maze Pond, Southwark, raised over twenty guineas on one Sunday. MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 9 December 1788.

subscriptions may have allowed working-class supporters to make a financial contribution to the cause. A Friendly Society, meeting in the Mason's Arms at Whitefield, subscribed three guineas to the Manchester committee at the height of the 1788 petition campaign.¹²⁰ According to Drescher, some Friendly Societies were invited to petition in 1792.¹²¹

The call for subscriptions periodically rallied supporters to the cause and revived provincial activity, although it would appear that the London Society was slow to appreciate this fact. In Autumn 1788, James Ramsay repeatedly urged the London committee to issue a call for subscriptions through the press: 'You can never get the public to engage but by adopting this universal mode, which is expected, and is necessary.'¹²² Ramsay was clear that the call for subscriptions had to be conducted publicly: they were a means of raising public opinion, a fact born out by the provincial response. The appeal for subscriptions which followed energised the centres of provincial abolitionism once more.¹²³ In December 1788, the Manchester Society raised in excess of forty four guineas (roughly in excess of £3,000 in modern terms).¹²⁴ In Norwich, Rev. Leigh prepared advertisements for the local newspapers which he cleared with the London Society.¹²⁵ Remittances were also received from Sheffield, Chesterfield and Birmingham.¹²⁶ Simply holding a meeting of subscribers for this purpose brought new friends to the cause:

'There was a very good meeting especially when it is consider'd that none were expected to appear who had not already subscribed towards the expense incurred by procuring information, publishing tracts & various other expenditures necessary in this great cause; or who did not intend to subscribe that day.'¹²⁷

Subscriptions were also opened in several places for the first time: in Hull, where a committee was organised by Wilberforce's brother-in-law, Rev. Thomas Clarke, one hundred pounds was raised and sent to the London Society.¹²⁸ In Edinburgh, a committee of fifteen was formed and a subscription opened.¹²⁹ The London Society's funds rose from 'being nearly exhausted' to in excess of £1,000 in little under two

¹²⁰ *Manchester Mercury*, 11 March 1788.

¹²¹ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 80.

¹²² Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. III, letter from James Ramsay to James Phillips, 6 September 1788; Vol. II, letter from James Ramsay to James Phillips, 1 November 1788.

¹²³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 7 October 1788, 11 November 1788.

¹²⁴ *Manchester Mercury*, 16 December 1788.

¹²⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 9 December 1788.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 February 1789, 6 April 1789, 14 April 1789.

¹²⁷ MSS Plymley diaries, book 4.

¹²⁸ *York Courant*, 25 November 1788; MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 10 February 1789.

¹²⁹ Edinburgh resolutions, dated 20 December 1788, printed in *Manchester Mercury*, 21 April 1789.

months.¹³⁰ By July 1789, the London Society had received over £2,200 (£176,000) in subscriptions from across the country.¹³¹ Furthermore, in the following years, repeated calls elicited a similar response. The Birmingham Society immediately sent one hundred guineas to the national committee; the Manchester Society did the same two months later.¹³² Following the publication of the Society's report of July 1790, subscriptions were 'entered into in most capital Towns in the Kingdom.'¹³³ Provincial abolitionists were not only generous but highly responsive to London's appeals.

PAMPHLETEERS

Local abolitionists were also responsible for the distribution of pamphlets sent to them by the London Society. Many were kept busy 'from time to time... by inserting arguments in the papers.'¹³⁴ Frequently, pamphlets were kept in circulation by being handed to neighbours. Abolitionist propaganda thus distributed had great effect: the books Plymley had left in the Bishop Castle neighbourhood 'had excited the most general detestation & all to a man wou'd sign [a petition from] there.'¹³⁵ These duties were originally undertaken by individuals, those 'country correspondents' named in the list compiled by the Abolition Society, but local committees soon came to take over this work. By summer 1788, provincial committees had proven their worth as distributors of the Society's publications. 4,000 copies of the Society's second report were printed in August 1788: over 2,500 were sent to committees while the remaining 1,500 were sent to subscribers and provincial newspapers. The highest number of copies were sent to the most active committees: Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, York, Nottingham, Sheffield, Exeter, Norwich and Leeds.¹³⁶ These collective exertions could soon bring rewards. In less than six weeks at the beginning of 1792, the Edinburgh Committee distributed 5,000 copies of the abstract of evidence and 10,000 copies of an abridgement of the same. The speed at which this was done is remarkable: at one point Houlbourne was writing the abridgement 'sheet for sheet for

¹³⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 18 November 1788, 27 January 1789. The former contains the wording of an advertisement for subscriptions, subsequently repeated in the provincial press.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 28 July 1789.

¹³² Birmingham resolutions, dated 9 April 1789, printed in *Manchester Mercury*, 28 April 1789 and 19 October 1790.

¹³³ *York Courant*, 7 December 1790.

¹³⁴ MSS Plymley diaries, book 4.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, book 5.

¹³⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 12 August 1788, 26 August 1788. Edinburgh and Glasgow became similarly important but only in 1791-92.

the press.¹³⁷ Copies of the abstract were sent to members of the clergy throughout Scotland. This 'had the best effect & excited an almost universal detestation of the Slave Trade. The clergy [came] from all part to Edinburgh & ask what will be the most effectual steps they can take.' The Edinburgh committee advised them to print resolutions in the newspapers.¹³⁸ These exertions, paralleled in Glasgow, were instrumental in mobilising Scottish support during the 1792 campaign.

Provincial abolitionists also contributed to the quantity of pamphlet material in general circulation. Many of the tracts published at the local level were reprints of pamphlets issued by the London Society (abstention pamphlets were particularly popular). William Houlbourne wrote *A Short Address to the People of Scotland* in 1792 also promoted the abstention.¹³⁹ Provincial supporters also purchased and printed their own tracts for circulation: Captain Marjoribanks's *Slavery - An Essay in Verse* was published at the request of the Edinburgh committee in 1792.¹⁴⁰ Abstracts were particularly popular. Pamphlets, such as that produced from Rev. Beatson's sermon in Hull or Thomas Cooper's letters in Manchester, included arguments extracted from the abolitionist 'canon.' By these means, large tracts could be easily summarised and the principal arguments highlighted.¹⁴¹ Abstracts also had the advantage of being cheap to produce. Abolitionists in Hackney used material from Cooper's *Letters* and Fox's *Address* to produce their own pamphlet: 'This is printed by a Society which, had its funds been adequate to the expense, would rather have published those two excellent pamphlets.'¹⁴² Furthermore, as these tracts were cheap - Cooper's *Letters* were paid for by the Manchester society and distributed free of charge - they could reach a wide audience. Abolitionists also encouraged readers to pass their publications on to friends and neighbours and appear to have taken pamphlets from door to door.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ MSS Plymley diaries, book 6. The calculation of the amount of time taken is based on this source (quotations from a letter from Houlbourne, mid-February 1792), and a letter from William Dickson to James Phillips, dated 14 January 1792, in which Dickson notes that circulation only began in the preceding week. Thompson-Clarkson collection, Vol. II.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, books 4 and 5.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, book 6.

¹⁴⁰ Oldfield, *op.cit.*, p. 166.

¹⁴¹ Beatson included extracts in his tract 'as the proceeding Sermon might fall into the hands of some persons who have not read any of the publications referred to in it.' John Beatson, *A Sermon, occasioned by that branch of British Commerce which extends to the human species. Preached to a congregation of Protestant Dissenters in Hull, January 21st 1789* (Hull, 1789), p. 48.

¹⁴² Anon [Hackney Society?], *Considerations on the Slave Trade; and the consumption of West India produce* (Hackney, 1791).

¹⁴³ The Settle committee noted that 'it is desired that this Abstract may be returned with all convenient Expedition to the Person who brought it, as the Committee wishes it to Circulate as quickly as possible throughout the Country.' Settle Society circular, begins: 'The committee formed for the purpose of disseminating knowledge... recommend the attentive perusal of the annex'd Abstract...' (Settle, 1791).

Provincial abolitionists also produced their own original works. Many were versions of addresses to the public which had succeeded in encouraging provincial supporters to mobilise. The York committee asked William Mason to print a speech which he had delivered, which launched an inhabitants petition and led to the formation of a committee.¹⁴⁴ In Hull, Rev. Thomas Clarke set a local petition in motion through a sermon which he was also subsequently asked to publish.¹⁴⁵ These, and other pamphlets like them, found their way into national circulation. Within one month of the release of Mason's sermon as a pamphlet, a second edition was printed by the York committee and a new imprint released in London by James Phillips.¹⁴⁶ The Dean of Middleham in North Yorkshire wrote one of the earliest and most widely circulated pamphlets issued by the London Society. Throughout this and subsequent campaigns, local abolitionists submitted pamphlets directly to the London Society.¹⁴⁷ In February 1789 the London Society purchased one hundred copies of a sermon by a provincial abolitionist and ordered the printing of 250 copies of the resolutions raised at a recent meeting in Edinburgh.¹⁴⁸ Two months later, the Society sent its thanks to Rev. Thomas Burgess of Oxford who had published and distributed a tract of his own - Burgess was subsequently elected as an honorary and corresponding member of the committee.¹⁴⁹

William Roscoe was one such abolitionist who wrote principally for the London Society and for national circulation. In 1787, two poems were produced by members of the Literary Society and represent some of the earliest pieces of provincial abolitionist propaganda during the public campaign. Edward Rushton's *West Indian Eclogues* was written 'with a view of making the public better acquainted with the evil of the Slave-trade, and of exciting their indignation against it.'¹⁵⁰ The second poem was part one of William Roscoe's *The Wrongs of Africa*, prefaced by James Currie, another member of the Roscoe Circle. Through John Barton, a Quaker literary agent in London and member of Meeting for Sufferings sub-committee, Roscoe arranged for the poem to be printed in London and Liverpool in April 1787.¹⁵¹ In July,

¹⁴⁴ *York Courant*, 26 February 1788.

¹⁴⁵ *York Courant*, 21 February 1792. Advertisement for meeting in Kingston-upon-Hull on 13 February 1792.

¹⁴⁶ William Mason, *An occasional discourse preached in the Cathedral of St. Peter in York, January 27, 1788, on the subject of the African Slave-Trade* (York and London, 1788).

¹⁴⁷ Charles Lloyd Evans of West Bromwich sent a tract he had written on the treatment of slaves. MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 2 December 1788.

¹⁴⁸ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 24 February 1789.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 April 1789, 28 April 1789. The tract was entitled *Considerations on the abolition of the slave trade on grounds of National, Religious and Political Duty*.

¹⁵⁰ Clarkson, *History*, I, chapter 17. Clarkson first heard of Rushton's poem while travelling through Chester for the London Society.

¹⁵¹ Roscoe Papers, 920 ROS: No. 243, Barton to Roscoe, 27 March 1787; No. 244, Barton to Roscoe, 6 April 1787. Perhaps printed at the request of the Quaker sub-committee.

he offered the profits of the first part to the newly-formed London Society.¹⁵² The poem appears to have caught the abolitionists' imagination. The Manchester committee quoted extracts from the first part of *The Wrongs of Africa* in one of their earliest appeals to the public through the pages of the *Manchester Mercury*.¹⁵³ Clarkson also singled out the poem, and its author, as one of the important forerunners of the cause.¹⁵⁴ While writing the second part of *Wrongs of Africa* (which was presented to the London Society in the early months of 1788¹⁵⁵), Roscoe wrote a short pamphlet entitled *A General View of the African Slave Trade* which contained an appeal for a system of increasing duties on the slave trade and slave produce which would extinguish the slave trade *and* slavery in under ten years. The pamphlet had the desired effect in the port and was rapidly taken up in London: 'I rejoice to find that thy pamphlet has occasioned a ferment amongst the African Merchants of Liverpool,' wrote John Barton. 'I trust it will occasion a ferment amongst our Senators likewise.'¹⁵⁶ Roscoe's pamphlet was so forward thinking that James Cropper, an originator of the anti-slavery campaign in the 1820s, delighted to find that Roscoe's views of thirty years previously were 'so nearly what is now wanted.'¹⁵⁷

Provincial abolitionists also took issue with the defenders of slavery. The London Society amassed a number of provincial pamphlets in opposition to a tract by Rev. Raymund Harris, a Spanish Jesuit of Liverpool, in which slavery and the slave trade were defended by scripture. The pamphlet was read widely and Harris became notorious as a result.¹⁵⁸ In recognition of his services in the defence of the slave trade, the Corporation of Liverpool sent Harris a gift of £100 in June 1788.¹⁵⁹ When Harris died in May 1789, the *York Courant* referred to him as 'Author of Scriptural Researches on the Business of the Slave Trade &c.'¹⁶⁰ *Scriptural Researches* immediately aroused religious indignation. At the beginning of May, James Ramsay submitted his own refutation of Harris of which 3,000 copies were immediately ordered.¹⁶¹ In July, a similar pamphlet by William Roscoe was purchased by the

¹⁵² MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, I: 7 July 1787.

¹⁵³ *Manchester Mercury*, 25 September 1787.

¹⁵⁴ Clarkson, *History*, Vol. I, pp. 280-282.

¹⁵⁵ Roscoe Papers, 920 ROS: Barton to Roscoe, 6 March 1788.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 241, John Barton to William Roscoe, 7 February 1788.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 1092, James Cropper to William Roscoe, 21 January 1823.

¹⁵⁸ Raymund Harris, *Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade*, 2nd edn. (Liverpool, 1788).

¹⁵⁹ Sir James Allanson Picton, *Municipal Archives and records: City of Liverpool Corporation*, 2 volumes (Liverpool, 1883-1886), vol I, p. 216.

¹⁶⁰ *York Courant*, 12 May 1789.

¹⁶¹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 6 May 1788.

London Committee and a new impression ordered.¹⁶² Roscoe was hailed for his 'laudable Zeal and great Abilities' by the London Committee.¹⁶³ Further attacks on Harris' pamphlet were received from three Anglican clergymen, the Rev. Henry Dannett, vicar of Liverpool, and Rev. William Hughes of Ware in Hertfordshire and James Ramsay.¹⁶⁴ The outrage at Harris' pamphlet encouraged several abolitionists to take up their pens for the cause.

SHAREHOLDERS

THE SIERRA LEONE SCHEME - 'A TRULY SPLENDID PROJECT.'¹⁶⁵

In recent years, historians have become more aware of the way in which the abolitionist campaign was run like a business. Oldfield has pointed to the marketing techniques of Wedgwood and the London Society and the reliance on a network of booksellers, newspapers and printers. Jennings has shown how four Quaker merchants were able to transfer their skills from their businesses to philanthropy. So far we have alluded to the role business connections played in transmitting information and spreading the abolitionist cause more generally. It is therefore interesting to note that the London abolitionists were the key players in the establishment of an anti-slavery business, one which reached into the provinces through the network of country correspondents. Wealthier abolitionists across the country were given the opportunity to assist in the destruction of the slave trade by purchasing shares in the Sierra Leone Company from 1791. The importance of the company to this discussion is three-fold. Firstly, the Sierra Leone scheme reinforced the abolition campaign, in a number of ways which have frequently been overlooked. Secondly, it provided another set of links between London and provincial sympathisers. And, thirdly, it tells us more about the mentality of the abolitionists.

¹⁶² For the surviving correspondence relating to Roscoe's pamphlet see Roscoe Papers, 920 ROS No. 254, Barton to Roscoe, 26 May 1788; No. 255, Barton to Roscoe, 2 July 1788; No. 256, Barton to Roscoe, 29 July 1788.

¹⁶³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 15 July 1788.

¹⁶⁴ Henry Dannett, *A Particular Examination of Mr. Harris's Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade* (1788); W. Hughes, *An Answer to the Rev. Mr. Harris's 'Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade'* (1788); James Ramsay, *Examination of the Rev. Mr. Harris's Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade* (1788); MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, II: 15 July 1788, 6 January 1789.

¹⁶⁵ Michael L. Walker, 'William Wilberforce at Rotherham,' in Rotherham Central Library. Letter from Wilberforce to Samuel Walker, 3 December 1791, p. 61.

The Sierra Leone scheme grew from the intentions of black and white philanthropists to relieve the problems of the black poor in London (see chapter one). In 1786, Granville Sharp obtained a grant of £15,000 from the treasury to establish a settlement at Sierra Leone. Three years later he proposed the formation of the St. George's Bay Company to provide continuing financial assistance for the settlers. The company, however, 'was no bait to self-interested capitalism.' Founded on benevolent intentions, and formed at the settlers' request, the scheme at first showed little chance of profits. At the first meeting of the board in February 1790, subscriptions were entered into 'as an act of kindness rather than as an investment.' However, with news that the first colony had been all but destroyed in April, and the government's apparent unwillingness to provide further financial assistance, Sharp was forced to turn to private investors. The St. George's Bay Company, by 1791, had one hundred subscribers and capital of £100,000 and in June it was incorporated by act of Parliament despite fierce opposition from the West India lobby. During committee hearings, it became known as the Sierra Leone Company.¹⁶⁶

There is good reason to believe that the Sierra Leone Company was simply an extension of the abolitionists' campaign. Granville Sharp was the overseer of the scheme and chairman of the Abolition Society. Wilberforce and Clarkson each held ten shares at fifty pounds each and sat as directors. Alexander Falconbridge, the former surgeon of a slave ship who gave evidence for the abolitionists before the privy council hearings, was one of the company's first agents (he resided in the settlement during the first half of 1791). Clarkson's brother, John, was another agent of the company in 1792 and was later replaced by Zachary Macaulay, one of the most influential members of the Anti-Slavery Society in the 1820s and 1830s. Moreover, these connections increased as the company found its feet. At the height of attempts to secure the incorporation of the company, Henry Thornton, the company's chairman and principal spokesman in Parliament, was elected to the London Abolition Society.¹⁶⁷ Charles Grant, one of the company's thirteen directors, was also elected to the London Committee in December 1791.¹⁶⁸ The West India lobby was right to oppose the incorporation of the Sierra Leone Company out of fear of ulterior abolitionist motives for this was precisely the case. As Richard West has said 'it would be unfair to suggest that philanthropy was a cover for business interests. If anything, the reverse was true.'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 25-27; E. G. Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson - A Biography*, 2nd edn. (York, 1996), pp. 64-65.

¹⁶⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Committee, II: 10 May 1791.

¹⁶⁸ Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁶⁹ Richard West, *Back to Africa. A History of Sierra Leone and Liberia* (1970), p. 33.

If the Sierra Leone scheme proved to be as successful as expected, the abolitionists would have clinching proof of the validity of their case. Sharp hoped that the settlement of a peaceful self-governing community would encourage legitimate trade between Britain and Africa. In fact, the company was merely one of number of attempts to convince sceptics and opponents that there was a lucrative alternative to the transatlantic slave trade waiting for them in Africa. Equiano, in his *Interesting Narrative* and during his brief time as commissary to the settlement, argued that this was the case. Thomas Clarkson famously collected trade goods which could be obtained on the west coast of Africa and presented them to the Privy Council select committee. One York newspaper hoped that the scheme, funded by 'a very humane and intelligent Society of Gentlemen in London,' would 'lead to the Discovery of Articles of Commerce which will more than compensate for the loss of the Slave Trade.'¹⁷⁰ But the Sierra Leone company was also an attempt to establish alternative methods of tropical cultivation and thus to undermine the slave system directly. William Tuke of York relished in the fact that the scheme heralded a trial of strength between the opposing forces of free and slave labour. In 1791 he argued that the planters would be obliged 'not only to abolish the Slave Trade but slavery itself in the islands or find themselves under the necessity of selling their produce for loss.'¹⁷¹ The fourth report of the London Society, issued in July 1790, revealed 'a sophisticated understanding of the workings of the market economy and a desire to reconcile trade and conscience.'¹⁷² This newly-expressed understanding of the interrelation of trade and conscience had clear links to attempts to found the St. George's Bay Company which first fell foul of the West Indians in the same year.

Since the aims of the company were firmly humanitarian, the abolitionists insisted that the company and its shareholders recognised that their efforts were for the greater good of Africa. This was a very real concern at the time. Granville Sharp in particular feared that his reliance on private investors would lead to his plan being hijacked by uncompromising mercantile interests. Nevertheless, the abolitionists in London made efforts to insure that the moral basis of the scheme was not undervalued by self-interested motives. When shares were first offered to provincial supporters, Clarkson told Josiah Wedgwood:

'... I should not chose to permit any one to become a Purchaser, who would not be better pleased with the Good resulting to Africa than from great

¹⁷⁰ *York Courant*, 26 May 1789.

¹⁷¹ Letter from William Tuke to Henry Tuke, via. Thomas Palmer, 12 December 1791. Tuke Papers, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, University of York. See also E. G. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁷² Jennings, *op.cit.*, pp. 59-60.

Commercial Profit to himself; not that the latter may not be expected, but, in case of a disappointment, I should wish his mind to be made easy by the assurance that he has been instrumental in introducing Light and Happiness into a Country, where the Mind was kept in Darkness and the Body nourished only for European Chains.¹⁷³

It would appear that this position was adopted more generally. In December 1791, Henry Thornton announced that the subscriptions 'really seem to have been furnished in the main on warm principles of Benevolence.'¹⁷⁴ As the Sierra Leone scheme was first and foremost a benevolent endeavour which extended the abolitionists' ideas on moral reform, it was vitally important that the West Indians were excluded from the company. Thus the abolitionists put in place several safeguards and operated a strict recruitment policy. Firstly, a clause was written into the company's charter which prevented slave-holders from purchasing shares and serving on the committee.¹⁷⁵ Secondly, members could only be elected to the company if they were proposed by an existing member of the committee and that their election was approved by two-thirds of the shareholders. Clarkson recommended Joseph Plymley for membership in December 1791 and Plymley subsequently suggested others from Shropshire. And, thirdly, the company's board of directors was already overwhelmingly abolitionist and convinced of the need to maintain a subscription closed to their opponents. Most, if not all, of the principal shareholders had strong abolitionist sympathies.

It is therefore unsurprising to find that the Sierra Leone company became part of abolitionist mobilisation during 1791 and 1792 and that the scheme attracted great interest. The tours of Clarkson and Dickson in the last few months of 1791 combined efforts to revitalise committees, distribute the abstract of Privy Council evidence and organise petitions with new, less obvious attempts to recruit shareholders to the Sierra Leone Company. In October 1791, Clarkson dined with Joseph Plymley and three other members of the Shrewsbury abolition committee. 'What little time there was before dinner was wholly taken up upon subjects relative to the abolition,' wrote Joseph's sister, Katherine, '& with what is so much connected with it, the establishment of the Sierra Leone company.' In the following days, Clarkson and Plymley talked animatedly about the company and the need to extend its subscriptions: Plymley and the others appear to have taken at least one share each.¹⁷⁶ About a month later, Clarkson stayed with William Tuke in York and gave him 'most

¹⁷³ Wedgwood collection, Keele University Archives: E32/24742. Letter, Thomas Clarkson to Josiah Wedgwood, 17 June 1793.

¹⁷⁴ Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists - London's Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786-1791* (Liverpool, 1994), p. 227.

¹⁷⁵ Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, p. 238.

¹⁷⁶ MSS Plymley diaries, book 1, 20-21 October 1791; Book 2, 21-22 October 1791.

satisfactory information' about the Sierra Leone Company.¹⁷⁷ Clarkson also spoke to the precentor of York Minster, William Mason, who later 'contrived (by a sort of Lyrical transition in my sermon) not only to applaud the plan of that new Colony, but also to exhort my Audience to renew their petitions for abolition.'¹⁷⁸ Interest was sufficiently far advanced, even in the remotest parts of the country, that the scheme was the subject of much discussion. While touring Scotland, William Dickson needed to request further information about the Sierra Leone Company from Henry Thornton and the London Committee in order to answer the interested questions he had received.¹⁷⁹ When shares were finally offered to the public, almost as many were taken up in the provinces as in London, despite the very real hindrance of requiring shareholders to attend regular meetings in the capital to vote on the company's policy.¹⁸⁰

The size of the company expanded rapidly. In February 1791, the petition to Parliament for the incorporation of the company contained the signatures of one hundred subscribers.¹⁸¹ Six months later, the Company had £50,000 in subscriptions but it was still felt necessary to double the amount.¹⁸² In January 1792, the company's directors sought to raise £150,000; in the following month, the proposed amount had risen to half a million pounds.¹⁸³ As the company grew, and became established, so the returns increased. In March 1792, the shares were already 'above par,' despite initial expectations that profits would be small.¹⁸⁴ Joseph Plymley acted as Clarkson's agent for the Sierra Leone company (and abolition) in Shropshire and the West Midlands following his election to the company in late 1791. In January 1792, Clarkson wrote to Plymley with an urgent appeal for new subscribers: the company 'wish[ed] to fill up with safe names as the West Indians are trying to get in.'¹⁸⁵ Plymley instantly suggested three new shareholders and informed Clarkson that Mr. Wilding, one of the Shrewsbury committee, wished to buy another share.¹⁸⁶ The role of personal affiliation at the local level was clearly important: Plymley ransacked his list of friends and contacts, most members of the Shrewsbury committee. In the next few weeks, he

¹⁷⁷ Letter from William Tuke to Henry Tuke, via. Thomas Palmer, 12 December 1791. Tuke Papers, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, University of York. See also E. G. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁷⁸ W. Mason to T. Gisbourne, 29 December 1791, in Wilberforce Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, d 14 f 1, quoted in E. G. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁷⁹ Thompson-Clarkson collection, vol. II: Letter from William Dickson, Edinburgh to James Phillips, 14 January 1792.

¹⁸⁰ Fyfe, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁸¹ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁸² MSS Plymley diaries, book 1, 20-21 October 1791; book 2, 21-22 October 1791.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, book 5, 9-24 February 1792.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, book 6, 24 February to 5 March 1792.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, book 4, 23 January 1792.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

visited Mr Eydon, the Mayor of Shrewsbury, whom he convinced to hold a public meeting to petition for the total abolition of the slave trade and to purchase one share in the Sierra Leone scheme at the same time. He then went to Coalbrookdale to breakfast with Richard Reynolds who purchased two shares.¹⁸⁷ In the following month, Plymley was informed that the company's capital was to increase to half a million pounds and that further additional shareholders were to be balloted for in March.¹⁸⁸ As a result, he attended the company's annual meeting in London with the intention of purchasing a further two shares for Reynolds.¹⁸⁹ In total, Plymley appears to have found ten subscribers to the Company who held between them fourteen shares - a total investment of £700 (roughly equivalent to £56,000 today).

It can therefore be reasonably claimed that the Sierra Leone scheme was a natural extension of abolitionist theory and efforts. The company was seen as a practical way in which the abolitionists could demonstrate the impropriety and inefficiency of slavery as well as reassuring slavers that the abolition of the slave trade would not result in inevitable loss. It was a testing ground for abolitionist ideas, one which had to be kept pure both from West Indian influence and greed for their points to stand. As such it appealed to both the humanitarian designs and business acumen of wealthy middle-and upper-class abolitionists in London and the provinces. It also echoed the rise of the abstention movement in showing a desire to effect the abolition of slavery through other more practical means, as a consequence of disillusionment with the time-consuming process of hearing evidence. And it allowed the London Society to maintain contact with some friends in the country, during a period of limited provincial efforts, while also disseminating information and consolidating the network of provincial correspondents. The Sierra Leone Company was therefore the logical consequence of the abolitionists' use of business techniques. Moreover, it provided the London Society with practical means which could continue uninterrupted during periods of relative quiet. In August 1793, the London Society congratulated the friends of humanity on the arrival of the first legitimate trading ships from Sierra Leone 'loaded with the produce of Africa, neither disgraced with injustice, nor stained with blood.'¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Reynolds is one of the few Quakers who subscribed to the Sierra Leone Company. Clarkson informed Plymley that the Quakers, 'tho' so friendly to the Abolition, wou'd not have any concern in the S. Leone Company, because they judged it necessary to take fire arms in their ships for self defence.' Richard Reynolds, the Quaker industrialist and son-in-law of Abraham Darby II who became 'Coalbrookdale's company banker,' took his shares in the company through Plymley. He noted that previously he had no way to purchase them as the Quakers had nothing to do with the scheme. MSS Plymley diaries, book 4, 30 January 1792; Walvin, *The Quakers*, p. 111.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, book 5, 9-24 February 1792.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Book 8, 20 March to 6 April 1792.

¹⁹⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 20 August 1793.

Thus the opportunities available to provincial abolitionists to assist in the cause were numerous, frequently undertaken but not always open to all supporters. Most supporters could subscribe - even the poorest unskilled labourer could donate through a friendly society - but only the rich could afford shares in the Sierra Leone Company. While prominence has previously been given to petitioning, we have seen that the abolitionists were able to contribute in other ways, thus redirecting the focus from the boom years of 1788 and 1792 to the quieter years in between. Subscriptions raised during the malaise caused by the lengthy and expensive investigations in Parliament periodically revived interest. In the previous chapters we have also seen how abolitionists contributed by obtaining evidence and witnesses for examination before these hearings. Lobbying and pledging (the former encouraged, the latter not) also continued during these quiet years, reinforcing the London Committee's exertions and illustrating an eagerness throughout the country to become directly involved in influencing Parliamentary decisions. This same mentality contributed to the rise of the abstention movement described in chapter three and the formation of the Sierra Leone Company, an institution usually disassociated from the abolitionist campaign which nevertheless illustrates the aims of anti-slavery supporters, their attachment to benevolent principles and the very real significance of their commercial acumen and business skills to the cause. Moreover, the most active supporters of the movement did not exist in isolated pockets as has previously been asserted: abolitionists were in frequent and direct contact with each other in numerous ways. But it must be remembered that the timing and the nature of most of these activities were controlled from London. Provincial abolitionists remained remarkably quick to respond to events in Parliament and the Old Jewry (where the London Committee met) partly because of the parallel networks of abolitionist affiliations. In these years, provincial abolitionists were responsive to London's agenda, not their own.

Chapter 5

VICTORY AND LEGACY - THE HEIRS OF ABOLITION, 1806-1814.

The period 1792-1823 has traditionally been viewed as a barren landscape for historians of popular abolitionism. However, in recent years, Seymour Drescher has argued that these years show a 'popular continuity in British abolitionism.'¹ During the general elections of 1806 and 1807, abolition once again became an issue with which parliamentary candidates had to contend. In 1814, an unprecedented number of abolitionist petitions were raised in protest against the continuation of the French slave trade which had been permitted to continue for five years under the terms of the Treaty of Paris. In this chapter, we will look at these examples of abolitionism and question how far they were spontaneous. We will also consider the role played by public opinion in the abolition of the British slave trade. And we will look at the way in which the post-abolition era saw abolition reinvented as a national virtue.

'POPULAR' ABOLITION AND THE PASSAGE OF THE ABOLITION ACT, 1806-7.

Historians have traditionally resisted attempts to accord a role to public opinion in the final passage of the bill for the abolition of the slave trade. This process has been viewed variously as a transaction between elites, as the function of parliamentary lobbying, government wrangling and political debate. Recently, Drescher has argued that public opinion, far from lying silent (or silenced), played an active part in the legislative process and created a context conducive to abolition. He has also stressed the relative autonomy of these expressions of popular sentiment.² However, Drescher's argument fails to take account of the efforts of the London Society. While Oldfield minimises these metropolitan efforts, Drescher has mistaken their results for spontaneous expressions of popular support.³ In this section, I will argue that abolitionism was less popular or widespread than Drescher has suggested, but that local abolitionists did assist the London Committee in its endeavours by reviving

¹ Seymour Drescher, 'Whose Abolition? Popular pressure and the ending of the British Slave Trade,' *Past and Present*, 143 (May 1994), p. 140.

² *Ibid.*

³ J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-slavery, 1787-1807* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 63-64; J. R. Oldfield, 'The London Committee and Mobilisation of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade,' *The Historical Journal*, No. 35, vol. 2 (1992), pp. 331-343.

those duties of collecting evidence and lobbying which have been neglected by historians (chapters two and four). By so doing, they were able to make a contribution to the national campaign.

On 23rd May 1804, one week before Wilberforce's annual motion in the Commons, the London Society met for the first time in seven years. The preponderance of MPs and the attendance of Wilberforce suggests the Abolition Society's focus was fixed on the progress of the cause in Parliament. However, this focus did not preclude appeals to the country. Although the bill for total abolition quickly passed through the Lower House, the Lords halted its progress by appointing a committee to hear evidence.⁴ Faced with another expensive parliamentary investigation, the London Committee quickly reopened official communications with their country correspondents. In August, one thousand letters requesting subscriptions and evidence to be put before the House of Lords were printed and sent to friends in the country.⁵ Another five hundred copies of a letter appealing for subscriptions followed five months later.⁶ The minutes of the abolition society do not give any indication of the success of these exertions. However, it is noticeable that in York where the most public abolitionist exertions were observed, subscriptions were not advertised or alluded to.⁷

At the beginning of 1805, and after a gap of over four months, the London Committee met again. Their renewed activity appears to have alerted the West Indian lobby who once more reinstated their own propaganda subcommittee.⁸ Although the West Indians complained that 'violent propaganda' had been worked up by abolitionists in the north of England, it is worth noting that up to this point the revived London Committee had only circulated tracts among Members of Parliament and had not tried to educate public opinion.⁹ Indeed, the West Indians probably exaggerated the case for their own political benefit as, at the end of February, they condemned abolitionism as 'a remnant of Jacobinism' to stall the abolition bill in the Commons on its second reading.¹⁰ The London Committee immediately asked its country correspondents to persevere in raising funds and locating evidence. A public meeting was proposed and

⁴ MSS 'Minute Books of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade,' BM Add MSS. 21,256 (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Abolition Society, III'): 23 May 1804; Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade, 1783-1807* (1997), p. 101.

⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 17 July 1804. At the same meeting, John Crisp, later the secretary of the Agency Committee, was appointed as the Society's secretary.

⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 29 January 1805.

⁷ Based on a survey of the *York Courant*, July 1804 to March 1805.

⁸ Judith Jennings, 'Joseph Woods, "Merchant and Philosopher": The Making of the British Anti-Slave Trade Ethic,' *Slavery and Abolition*, 14 (1993), pp. 162-84.

⁹ Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?' p. 140; MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 23 May 1804 to 29 April 1805.

¹⁰ Jennings, *Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade*, p. 102.

a list of supporters in and around London compiled to aid its quick calling but in less than two weeks the project was called off.¹¹ It seems likely that the shadow of Jacobinism, once again used by the West Indians to force the postponement of the bill in the Commons,¹² prompted the London abolitionists to avoid large public meetings. This fact is significant for it determined the methods subsequently approved and promoted by the London Society until the passage of the abolition act.

With efforts in Parliament halted, Wilberforce worked on Pitt to ensure that the moment was not lost. In mid-August, Pitt was persuaded to obtain a Royal Order in Council to limit the slave-trade to foreign colonies. By so doing, the abolitionists effectively declared two-thirds of the slave trade illegal and opened a loop-hole which they then successfully exploited in the following year.¹³ Meanwhile, the Committee's appeals to the country increased. At the end of April, five hundred copies of *Horrors of Negro Slavery* were purchased. Two months later, six thousand copies of a circular letter requesting subscriptions were printed.¹⁴ A little over a month later, this number had increased to twelve thousand and the number of the *Horrors* pamphlet to seventeen thousand. Again, the Society of Friends proved to be the London Committee's principal agent. The Quakers distributed of both the circular letter and perhaps as many as 11,500 copies of the pamphlet 'to a great extent and free of charge.'¹⁵ At the same time, Wilberforce suggested that Clarkson take up the task of collecting witnesses to give evidence before the Lords. Clarkson once more agreed and was forwarded £150 to cover the costs of his tour.¹⁶

The details of Clarkson's tour are sketchy but suggest that he still found avid supporters across the country. In a letter to the London Committee, Clarkson said that he had found 'the ardour of all the former friends of the Abolition... to remain unabated and that wherever he had been all ranks of people were warm in the cause and desirous of lending their aid.' However, 'the rising generation of persons from eighteen to twenty-five years of age [were] very uninformed upon the subject.'¹⁷

'When... I conversed with these [young people], as I travelled along, I discovered a profound attention to what I said; an earnest desire to know

¹¹ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III, 6 March 1805 to 19 March 1805.

¹² Jennings, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

¹³ Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (1975), pp. 346-348.

¹⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 1 June 1805, 3 June 1805.

¹⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 9 July 1805.

¹⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 29 April 1805, 14 May 1805. Drescher suggests that Clarkson's tour was 'to revive the local committees' but this was not the avowed intention (although four were formed). Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?' p. 140.

¹⁷ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 9 July 1805. The minute records a summary of the content of Clarkson's letter.

more of the subject; and a generous warmth in favour of the injured Africans, which I foresaw could soon be turned into enthusiasm. Hence I perceived that the cause furnished us with endless sources of rallying; and that the ardour, which we had seen with so much admiration in former years, could be easily renewed.’¹⁸

Clarkson once more stopped at Longnor and stayed with the Plymleys. Joseph, now Archdeacon Corbett, assisted Clarkson in his search for two surgeons formerly employed on slave ships.¹⁹ Clarkson also formed committees in Bristol, Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Worcester ‘who would undertake to instruct the Members of those places and also to procure Instructions from Freeholders to their Country Members.’ While Clarkson testifies to the latent support waiting for the signal, one must not mistake this for mobilisation. The London Society moved quietly and cautiously, using their contacts with known friends of abolition and disavowing openly public measures to ensure that their work would not be regarded as dangerous or seditious.

The caution evident in these early moves was once more obvious in the spring of 1806 when country correspondents were again called upon to assist the cause. Popular mobilisation had not been in the mind of the committee (which did not meet between July 1805 and March 1806), nor was it the focus of their attention now. Selected supporters were asked to press their MPs to attend the abolition debates: these measures would ‘be more advisable at this time than the holding of public Meetings in favour of it.’ They further asked that these applications be made by separate letters from individuals rather than from a committee ‘and that it will be necessary by all means to avoid any impressions which may give the appearance of being made at the instigation of others, rather than of coming from the spontaneous sentiments of the writers.’²⁰ In the first case, the London Society wished to avoid breaking the laws which restricted public associations and freedom of speech. But the committee was also sensible to the utility of suggesting that support for abolition had lain dormant, that respectable individuals remained enamoured with the cause and that many individuals, independently of each other, were convinced that the slave trade should be abolished. Clarkson noted that without such a general expression of public opinion ‘we should appear to be losing ground.’²¹ This was a more covert campaign than that of 1792 and was conducted on a considerably smaller scale. Although Clarkson’s tour

¹⁸ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 Vols. (1808), vol. II, p. 502.

¹⁹ MSS Corbett of Longnor Estate, Diaries of Katherine Plymley (Ref. 1066) held in Shropshire County Record Office, Shrewsbury (hereafter cited as MSS ‘Plymley diaries’), books 64 and 65.

²⁰ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 7 March 1806.

²¹ Thomas Clarkson to Charles Lloyd, 8 March 1806, from Lloyd MSS 2/207, quoted in Jennings, *Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade*, p. 106.

suggests that support waited in abeyance, the spontaneity of abolitionism in 1806 must be questioned.²²

There is no evidence to suggest that public opinion had an impact on the passage of the Foreign Slave Trade Bill which became the focus of the campaign in April and May 1806. If one is inclined to be generous, lobbying in the provinces may have been undertaken for the express purpose of increasing attendance for Wilberforce's general motion. If so, the deferral of Wilberforce's motion in favour of the government's Foreign Slave Trade bill may have confused matters. However, if the lobbyists had expressed a wider desire for attendance at all abolition debates (as they had in previous years), they appear to have had little or no success. The number of MPs who voted in both Houses on the Foreign Slave Trade bill was extremely small: the third reading in the Commons was passed by thirty-five to thirteen while that in the Lords passed by forty-three to eighteen. By Drescher's own account, 'abolitionist support in the Commons was more muted than for any bill in two decades of debates.' That this bill was the one 'least likely to have stimulated popular mobilisation'²³ does not evade the important fact that supporters had been called upon to act and with negligible results: if Members of Parliament were induced to attend the debates by the public, few of them actually responded to their appeals. In June, MPs supported Fox's resolution against the slave trade in greater numbers (114 to 15) but this still represents a mere 40% of those who voted in favour of abolition in 1807. In fact public opinion, if it had manifested itself, would have caused more harm than good: the London abolitionists had determined to follow a low-key approach and to destroy much of the slave-trade by covert measures. This approach fooled pro-abolition MPs as much as it did the West Indian lobby. It follows that if public opinion had been expressed at this time, the West Indians would have been alerted to the real importance of the Foreign Slave Trade bill and orchestrated their defence more effectively, rather than realising its true importance too late in the day.

At the end of July 1806, two thousand copies of a circular letter on the state of the cause were circulated throughout the country.²⁴ Abolition now seemed certain. However, the death of Fox in September (who had succeeded Pitt in January) and the rumoured dissolution of Parliament set the abolitionists to work once more. In October, a sub-committee was appointed to consider 'such measures as may appear to

²² Drescher makes no use of the committee's minutes for 1806-7 in his article 'Whose Abolition?' As a result he may not have appreciated the aims of the London Society or the methods adopted to achieve them.

²³ Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?' p. 142.

²⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 30 July 1806.

them proper' for promoting the abolition if the dissolution came.²⁵ Although the committee did not meet again until after the November elections, it is reasonable to suggest that the London Society advocated pledging. Although Drescher insists that 'for the first time in the history of abolition the slave trade became a real election issue,' pledging had been first proposed in the 1790 election by both the Manchester Committee and the Society of Friends who encouraged abolitionists to vote only for candidates who promised to give their votes to abolition.²⁶ Furthermore, provincial abolitionists had been encouraged to contact their MPs less than nine months previously in anticipation of the Commons debates. A precedent and channel existed for local abolitionists to influence their MPs in the course of the 1806 election.

In Yorkshire, Wilberforce faced an expensive contest for his seat when Walter Fawkes won the support of Earl Fitzwillian and was put forward as a Whig candidate. His other opponent was Henry Lascelles, second son of the Earl of Harewood, perhaps the largest slave-holder in Barbados with plantations scattered across other islands. Here, the slave trade issue certainly played a part. Wilberforce made no mention of the slave trade in his own appeals to the Yorkshire freeholders but quickly received the backing of the Quakers, Methodists and Protestant Dissenters who canvassed their own denominations for supporters. Fawkes too declared his abolitionist intentions though his patron was a slave-holder. For Lascelles, however, his family's slave-holding activities could not be ignored. But the crucial issue in the election was not abolition but the relative state of the cloth and woollen industries: indeed Lascelles' mishandling of this issue had led to Fawkes's candidacy in the first instance. At the beginning of November, Lascelles withdrew his nomination, appreciating the level of support gained by Fawkes across the manufacturing districts of the West Riding. Nevertheless, a review of the election's proceedings also attributed Lascelles withdrawal in part to the opposition of the aforementioned religious groups on abolitionist principles.²⁷ Abolition was also raised as an electoral issue in Kent, Northampton, Durham and Cumberland.²⁸

The evidence suggests that the slave trade *did* become an electoral issue at this time but how far this can be considered a general phenomenon is questionable. Certainly, Drescher's claim that popular support for the abolition of the slave trade extended so far as to secure the election of William Roscoe as MP for Liverpool is an

²⁵ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 17 October 1806.

²⁶ See chapters 2 and 4 of the present work.

²⁷ E. A. Smith, 'The Yorkshire Elections of 1806 and 1807: A Study in Electoral Management,' *Northern History*, II (1967), pp. 62-90. See especially pp. 64-69; *A Report of the Proceedings relative to the Election for Yorkshire, 13 November 1806* (York, 1806).

²⁸ Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?', pp. 146-147.

exaggeration. Roscoe's election had nothing to do with changing local public opinion, though opinion did change following the abolition itself. His election handbill, 'ROSCOE, OUR TOWNSMAN!', neglected to mention his position on the slave trade which indeed he had endeavoured to keep secret for the preceding twenty years. When he mentioned the trade at his celebration dinner after the victory, the audience were noticeably disenchanted! The reason for his election lay in the disenchantment felt by the Liverpool Whigs with their candidate Banastre Tarleton. After several unwilling or unsuitable candidates had been proposed, Roscoe was nominated only two days before the election by Thomas Leyland and Thomas Earle, the most prominent local slave traders (the former was Roscoe's banking partner). When Tarleton allied himself with Gascoyne and both stood forward as the candidates of the Common Council, the contest became a straightforward test of anti-corporation sentiment with Roscoe the principal benefactor. Roscoe may also have bribed the electorate: though a late starter in the contest, he spent £12,000 compared to the £7,000 spent by his two opponents combined over a longer period.²⁹ If any contemporaries felt that Roscoe's election reflected 'a change of heart in Europe's principal slave-trading centre,'³⁰ their illusions were shattered in March 1807 by the attack on Roscoe's carriage by a mob of angry sailors when he returned to Liverpool having voted for in favour of the abolition. Roscoe quickly decided never to stand for election again.³¹

Nevertheless, abolition was raised during the general election of 1806 and may have influenced the voting habits of elected Members of Parliament in the early months of 1807. Bamber Gascoyne complained that pledging had been widespread during the contest (although there is no evidence to suggest this in his home constituency of Liverpool). Two months later, when the bill was read in the Commons, he once again argued that 'the Church, the theatre, and the press, had laboured to create a prejudice against the Slave Trade.' Pledges were also carried out: Fawkes and the member for Kerry both stated that they supported abolition out of duty to their electors.³² The London Society, meanwhile, made no attempts to mobilise public support during 1807. Instead, the committee lobbied furiously, countered West Indian defences in the press and corrected misunderstandings relating to the wording of the bill's preamble (which was amended but did not change the substance of the law).³³ The bill quickly

²⁹ Gail Cameron and Stan Crooke, *Liverpool - Capital of the Slave Trade* (Liverpool, 1992), pp. 57-59. Roscoe's handbill is printed on p. 58 and contains no mention of the slave trade.

³⁰ Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?', p. 147.

³¹ For an overview see Mark Jones, 'The Nature of the Liverpool Movement for the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1787-1807,' BA thesis, University of York (1995).

³² Jennings, *Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade*, pp. 110-112; Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?', pp. 148-149.

³³ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 26 December 1806 to 25 March 1807.

passed through the Lords where it was introduced as a government measure by the Prime Minister, then the Commons where it was slightly amended and back to the Lords where it was passed on 23rd March 1807. Two days later, the bill received Royal Assent and a final letter was drafted to the 'principal friends of the abolition of the slave trade' throughout the country:

'Sir,

'We have great pleasure in announcing to you that the Bill for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade has this day received the Royal Assent by Commission and is now passed into a Law. We request you to communicate this very satisfactory intelligence to the friends of the Abolition in your Neighbourhood, and we trust that the Success which has hitherto attended their exertions will encourage them to continue their co-operation with this Society in its endeavours to promote the observance of the Act.'³⁴

There can be no denying that between 1805 and 1807, popular support manifested itself in favour of abolition. But to suggest that these efforts constituted a 'mobilisation' or that they were particularly autonomous would be overstating the case. The abolitionists used their established network of trusted correspondents to reinforce the tasks of the London Committee at a local level. Public meetings were explicitly opposed as was even the merest suggestion of collective action. The London Society hoped to imply that public support could be mobilised once again without risking the adverse effects of such a mobilisation. At times, such as mid-1805, popular pressure could present a significant danger to the success of the movement; at others, during the general election of 1806, the suggestion of a command of public support was a useful tactic. Nevertheless, one must conclude that there was a place for 'pressure from without' during the final stages of the passage of the abolition bill, no matter how unclear its extent or focus.

PARTY POLITICS AND THE HEIRS OF ABOLITION, 1807-1814

While the abolition of the slave trade passed through Parliament relatively undisturbed, the divisive political issue in the early months of 1807 was Catholic relief. Grenville and the Foxite Whigs attempted to introduce Roman Catholics into the ranks of the army to win over the significant Irish lobby in Parliament. When George III asked Grenville to confirm that these covert attempts at catholic

³⁴ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 25 March 1807.

emancipation would cease, the Prime Minister refused and the government resigned. The fall of the Ministry of all the Talents in March 1807 heralded another general election, a mere five months since the last. Abolitionist sentiment was once again a feature of the contest. In Surrey, an anonymous address urged the freeholders to defer from giving their votes to Mr. Sumner who had expressed himself hostile to the abolition.³⁵ Furthermore, an anonymous handbill to 'the Electors of Great Britain and Ireland' was distributed, probably by the Quakers, reminding voters that 'it is highly important to return Men to Parliament, who, whatever their former sentiments may have been on that great measure, are now sincerely disposed to watch over its execution and promote its efficacy.'³⁶ In fact, protecting the abolition was to be less important than dividing the spoils.

In Yorkshire, Wilberforce found himself facing an expensive contest. His opponents were Henry Lascelles and a new Whig candidate, Lord Milton, the son of Earl Fitzwilliam. Both the Lascelles and Fitzwilliam families were prominent landowners in Britain and the West Indies and fierce rivals; both quickly pledged their willingness to spend £100,000 each on the contest. Abolitionists across the country rallied to Wilberforce's aid once they received news that the election would be contested. A committee of the Society of Friends in York was formed to raise subscriptions and to canvass support to aid Wilberforce's election; the Methodists and Protestant Dissenters also advocated their support on anti-slavery grounds. Local Quakers were reminded that 'the unremitting labours of W. Wilberforce, in the cause of the oppressed Africans, have strong claims upon our Society for continued support.'³⁷ In the metropolis, the 'Friends of Mr. William Wilberforce' met at the New London Tavern, Cheapside, the occasional home of the Abolition Society, apparently without Wilberforce's knowledge. It was agreed that donations should be solicited from abolitionists across the country to buttress the existing county subscription for Wilberforce's election. Henry Thornton, a member of the London Committee since 1791, a director of the Sierra Leone company and the treasurer of the African Institution, was elected as treasurer of the fund, answerable to a committee of thirty-nine men headed by Lord Teignmouth.³⁸ The letter was subsequently printed and circulated throughout the country and in newspaper advertisement.

³⁵ Anon., *To the Freeholders of Surry* [sic] (Surrey, 1807).

³⁶ Anon., *To the Electors of Great Britain and Ireland* (dated by handwriting as 4 April 1807).

³⁷ MSS 'Election Squibs, 1806-7,' held in York Minster Library, York. Society of Friends at York circular, begins: 'At a Meeting of the Committee of Friends at York, appointed to promote the Interests of William Wilberforce Esq.' (York, 1807).

³⁸ MSS 'Election Squibs, 1806-7': Anon., *Mr. Wilberforce's Election* (York, 1807).

Drescher has put great emphasis on the fact that both Milton and Lascelles quickly disowned their slaving past.³⁹ However, while the slave trade was clearly an important issue it proved to be far from decisive. A contest based purely on slaving connections would prove utterly ineffective for either of Wilberforce's supporters. When Milton's handbill, 'A Few Plain Questions answered,' was released containing an attack on the slave-holding of the Lascelles, the Lascelles' camp quickly responded with 'A Few Plain Questions answered as they ought to be' in which they alluded to Fitzwilliam's slave-holding and his opposition to abolition.⁴⁰ Both families were implicated and could merely accuse the other while defending themselves - no gain on this issue alone could be had. Instead, the slave trade issue was used to reinforce other political points. The Methodists of the county were encouraged to oppose Lascelles as a slave trader and an opponent of religious toleration: 'go to Harewood, and inquire if our brethren are not obliged to worship in a Cottage, being *prevented* from building a Chapel... Withhold your Votes from the Dealer in Slaves, and the Persecutors of your Friends.'⁴¹ Milton, meanwhile, accused Wilberforce of conspiring with Lascelles to gain votes from Wilberforce's abolitionist supporters. The 'Monstrous Coalition' rumour, publicised in a song of the same name, cost Wilberforce dearly - he estimated that he lost 8,000 votes through it - but again it is not certain that this was due simply to the slavery issue. Lascelles' hostility to the clothiers played a part. Milton's squibs ruthlessly linked the slavery and clothier issues in a parody of the York race meeting handbill: 'Lord H__W__D's black horse BARBADOES, by SLAVERY: rode by a LEEDS MERCHANT in *deep* Mourning.'⁴² Significantly, Wilberforce's support among the West Riding clothiers showed a fall and after his election, he took pains to counter the coalition rumour in his victory address and in an open letter to the freeholders of Yorkshire.⁴³ Since no gain could be made simply by claiming abolitionist credentials, the issue had to be fused with more contentious local problems.

Furthermore, if one looks at the handbills issued by Lascelles and Milton, far greater attention is paid to Catholic toleration and the fall of the previous government. The Yorkshire election was concerned with party-politics and approval or disapproval of the Talents ministry. The abolition of the slave trade proved to be one of the ministry's few achievements and so was rapidly subsumed in the party-political debate. Both the Whigs and the Tories tried to claim sole responsibility for the abolitionist victory. Tory supporters traced their ancestry from the persistent efforts of

³⁹ Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?', pp. 149-152 deals with the Yorkshire election of 1807.

⁴⁰ MSS 'Election Squibs, 1806-7': *A Few Plain Questions answered* (York, 1807); *A Few Plain Questions answered as they ought to be* (1807).

⁴¹ *Sheffield Iris*, 12 May 1807.

⁴² MSS 'Election Squibs, 1806-7': *York Spring Meeting. To start for the County Plate* (York, 1807).

⁴³ See R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 5 vols. (1838), vol. III, chapter 21.

Pitt as one of the first advocates of abolition in Parliament. Milton and friends of the Whig coalition stressed that their ministry had been the one which had finally succeeded in abolishing the slave trade. The same discourse can be seen in the election for the city of York where Milner and Dundas campaigned on their presence in the previous Parliament which had enacted the abolition. In effect, these were battles for the abolitionist spoils, a reflection on the changing attitudes of public opinion after the abolition of the slave trade. Drescher has seen in the 1807 election the power of popular abolitionism and its volatility: 'neither the "Saints" in London, nor Wilberforce and his opponents, [were] able to "orchestrate" popular antislavery.'⁴⁴ But it is by no means clear that this was anything more than claiming moral superiority after the event, a superiority which both parties were at pains to claim as their own. Far less attention was paid to ensuring that the abolition was not repealed in the next session than to who had secured the passage of abolition in the preceding ones.

The election of 1807 underscores the remarkable change which underwent British opinion in the years before and after the abolition of the slave trade. In the space of six years, Britain moved from being the grand-master of the slave trade to its scourge and destroyer. Those extra-Parliamentary humanitarian bodies, the Abolition Society and the Sierra Leone company, were amalgamated into the African Institution in April, a semi-official body pledged to promote the cultivation, civilisation and commerce of Africa and to secure the abolition of the slave trade carried on by foreign powers. Given remarkable freedom of use of government channels, including the diplomatic bags, the abolitionist leaders found themselves with more power to influence events than they had ever enjoyed previously.⁴⁵ Provincial supporters could be found on the fringes of this group. Following the passage of the Foreign Slave Trade bill in May 1806, the London Committee had quickly adopted the job of watchman. Letters were sent to correspondents in Liverpool, Bristol and other ports from which slave ships cleared, who were asked to report details of any slavers contravening the new law.⁴⁶ These groups became the eyes and ears of the African Institution in the West Indian outports. The power and influence of the African Institution reflected the status given to abolitionism following the passage of the bill, the transfer of abolition from a contentious extra-Parliamentary pressure group to a symbol of national pride and virtue. Even in Liverpool, the heart of Britain's slave-trading empire, there was a sense of change though evasion of the abolition laws and slave-owning remained big

⁴⁴ Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?', p. 151.

⁴⁵ E. G. Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson - A Biography*, 2nd edn. (York, 1996), pp. 119-120; James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (1986), p. 124.

⁴⁶ MSS Minutes of Abolition Society, III: 2 June 1806.

business. During the election of 1812, Canning's campaign manager, John Gladstone, was ridiculed for being a slave-trader: a cartoon of the time depicts Gladstone sitting on the box of his campaign coach, 'The African,' which was adorned with the familiar image of the kneeling slave.⁴⁷ In 1814, Liverpool would send her first anti-slavery petition to the Houses of Parliament, raised by Gladstone in conjunction with the abolitionist, William Roscoe.⁴⁸ The abolition of the slave trade, now effected, had many claimants on its legacy, not least the population of Great Britain who showed that they too had reached a consensus on the slave trade in 1814. ~~314~~.

THE CONSENSUS, 1814

At the beginning of April 1814 the Allies took Paris. A few days later, Napoleon abdicated. The peace negotiations provided the abolitionists with their most favourable opportunity to orchestrate a 'general' abolition of the European slave trades in over a decade. On the 3rd May, Wilberforce moved for an Address to the Regent calling on him to instruct his ministers to use the peace negotiations to abolish the slave trades. The motion passed unanimously: the British West Indian lobby had no interest in allowing the slave trade of their former competitors to continue and did not oppose the motion. Throughout May, the Foreign Secretary, Castlereagh, was locked in negotiations in Paris.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Zachary Macaulay, a former governor of Sierra Leone, was dispatched to France by the African Institution to excite public opinion. Neither of these efforts proved conducive to abolition: at the end of May, Macaulay informed Wilberforce that his efforts had failed while rumours spread that France would be returned her captured slave islands and allowed to revive her slave trade. When Castlereagh presented the Treaty of Paris to the Commons, he was met by tumultuous applause save one dissenting voice, that of Wilberforce, who lamented the continuance of the French slave trade for five more years.

Sir Samuel Romilly, who condemned the offending clause as 'a cruel disappointment,' immediately requisitioned the Duke of Gloucester for a meeting of the African Institution. On the 13th June, the directors met to consider the propriety of raising public opinion. Wilberforce, 'always afraid of giving offence to Ministers,'

⁴⁷ See S. G. Checkland, *The Gladstones - A Family Biography, 1764-1851* (Cambridge, 1971), chapter 9, pp. 59-70.

⁴⁸ MSS Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Public Record Office, 920 ROS: Nos. 1807 and 1790.

⁴⁹ For Castlereagh and the 3rd May resolution see C. K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1812-15*, 2 vols. (1931), vol. I, p. 272.

initially opposed the plan but after discussion relented and joined in a unanimous call for a general meeting of the friends of abolition on the 17th June in the Freemasons' Hall.⁵⁰ The meeting was exceptionally well attended despite fears to the contrary: William Allen was forced to stand 'being wedged in.'⁵¹ The abolitionists were astonished that the treaty should recognise the injustice and inhumanity of the trade and yet sanction its revival for a further five years. Moreover, it was less than certain that the French slave trade would be abolished when the time came: as Wilberforce noted on 3rd June, 'how can we hope that in five years' time, with so many additional motives to cling to the Trade, she will give it up?'⁵² Furthermore, the renewed French slave trade threatened the security and prosperity of Sierra Leone and a stretch of 1,500 miles along the north-west coast of Africa where the introduction of cultivation and legitimate commerce 'had begun to make some compensation for the miseries formerly inflicted.' The abolitionists therefore argued that since Britain had contributed to 'the general emancipation of Europe' she had the right 'to plead with success the cause of Africa.' A petition was raised and its sheets left for signature at Hatchard's on Piccadilly, 'Mr. Mortlock's China Manufactory' on Oxford Street, and three prominent taverns in the city.⁵³ Similar petitions were urged from across the country, imploring the government to bind France to an immediate abolition of her slave trade at the upcoming congress in Vienna.

In the days following the meeting, there was a flurry of activity in the metropolis. An African Institution sub-committee was appointed to carry out the business of the resolutions and a second to organise petitions and to join forces with others, not members of the Institution, for this task. They immediately dispatched a circular letter, comprising the resolutions of the general meeting and an appeal for petitions.⁵⁴ A second circular letter, four days later, this time from Thomas Clarkson on behalf of the all but defunct Abolition Society, also appealed for inhabitants petitions and the lobbying of MPs.⁵⁵ All correspondence was directed to Clarkson at the New London Tavern, Cheapside. There, he amassed a group of activists around him which included members of the old Abolition committee (William Allen and Richard Phillips) and friends among the Methodist leadership who helped to contact and rally provincial

⁵⁰ Samuel Romilly, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir. Samuel Romilly, Written by Himself*, 3 vols., 2nd edn. (1840), vol. III, pp. 136-140.

⁵¹ William Allen, *The Life of William Allen, with selections from his correspondence*, 3 vols. (1847), vol. I, p. 193.

⁵² R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *Life of Wilberforce*, vol. IV, p. 186.

⁵³ African Institution circular: 'Resolutions of the African Institution' (dated 17 June 1814).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Abolition Society circular, begins: 'You will no doubt have seen...' (dated 21 June 1814).

supporters and to distribute template petitions.⁵⁶ Though the work was initially chaotic, by 24th June two thousand letters had been sent to correspondents across the country. Three days later, the Quaker Meeting for Sufferings also appointed a committee on the slave trade and agreed to petition Parliament.⁵⁷ Petitions from across the country were received in the days after: Clarkson fully expected between five and six hundred petitions at least from across the country within the next month.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the sheets of the London petition were collected. 39,143 signatures were obtained in four days, although twice as many could have been received with more time.⁵⁹ The reason for the rush was Wilberforce's motion of the 27th June. After presenting the Freemasons' Hall petition (twenty-four other petitions were also presented that day), Wilberforce asked that a second Address to the Regent should be issued demanding an amendment of the peace treaty. His motion passed the Commons and the Lords without a division.⁶⁰

One may reason that the mobilisation of public opinion was calculated to effect the passage of this single motion but it soon became apparent that by appealing to the public the abolitionists were now required to make good their claims to hold the public voice. Abolition had to be seen to have maintained popular sanction. On the 1st July, Wilberforce wrote of recent appeals to raise public opinion: 'We are known to have made efforts to call for the expression of that feeling, and if it be not expressed, it will be supposed to be because it is not felt.' Wilberforce was sure that the success of Vienna 'will much depend on the degree in which the country appears to feel warmly on the question... I must say it would be very injurious, if our friends throughout the country were in general to forbear petitioning, under an idea of its being needless.'⁶¹ The abolitionist response, however, was intense and extensive. Petitions were quickly raised, fuelled by the news that 'large orders have been already received in this country from the French Slave merchants (and are at this moment in the course of manufacture) for iron collars, hand-cuffs, and other articles usual for securing and torturing the unhappy Negroes.'⁶² Members of the public were reminded that 'in National matters, which affect their own interest, it is the *right* of Englishmen to Petition their Legislature. In those which involve the eternal interests of Justice and Religion, it is their *duty*.'⁶³ In total, 861 petitions were received containing some

⁵⁶ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 126. The Wakefield inhabitants petition largely followed the form of the resolutions circulated by the African Institution: *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 8 July 1814.

⁵⁷ William Allen, *Life of William Allen*, I, p. 203.

⁵⁸ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125; Samuel Romilly, *Memoirs of Sir. Samuel Romilly*, vol. III, pp. 141-142.

⁶⁰ John Pollock, *Wilberforce* (1977), pp. 245-246.

⁶¹ R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *Life of Wilberforce*, vol. IV, p. 196.

⁶² *York Herald*, 9 July 1814.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

755,000 signatures.⁶⁴ Almost 95% of petitions came from the inhabitants: of these, only 6% were raised in conjunction with other privileged bodies. The petitions represented the widest franchise of any previous national expression of abolitionist sentiment.

The abolitionist campaign, however, was greatly endangered by the introduction of 'party feeling.' Wilberforce was particularly sensible to the fact that an attack on the treaty could be misconstrued as an attack on the Tory administration. As his sons noted, 'the nation rejoiced too heartily in the blessings of peace to have any sympathy with opposition.' Thus Wilberforce tried his best to avoid the matter becoming 'a party question' and noted that the Whigs had 'behaved handsomely in giving way to me.'⁶⁵ Ultimately, however, 'the political meaning of the petitioning was decided locality by locality.'⁶⁶ No doubt many observers took advantage of the situation to attack the government,⁶⁷ but many more tried to downplay their hostility to the Tories and appeal for cross-party support. The editor of the *Sheffield Iris*, while avowing himself no friend to the government, congratulated the ministry for negotiating the peace but lamented the slave trade clause: 'the *African Slave Trade*,' he wrote, 'is no longer, in this country, either a party or a commercial question; neither mercenary nor political interests are interwoven with it, to the prejudice of moral feelings and sound principles.'⁶⁸ Moreover, abolitionist speakers at public meetings were careful not to allow party politics to intrude. When seconding the call for a public meeting in York, Archdeacon Eyre 'wished to state, that in so doing, he by no means wished to impute blame to the peace maker.'⁶⁹ General appeals from concerned abolitionists urged all true friends to 'keep clear of every other political consideration relative to the Treaty till this clause is disposed of; it is *this one clause*, and *this only*, that we have steadily to keep in view.'⁷⁰ No doubt petitioning could later be interpreted by the Whigs as anti-ministerial in nature but at the time abolitionists worked hard to disavow any party-political intentions.

These petitions show that popular support was behind abolition but how far they reflect a continuously developing concern for abolitionism is by no means clear. Turley has suggested that there was a sizeable discontinuity in abolitionist support

⁶⁴ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 126.

⁶⁵ R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *Life of Wilberforce*, vol. IV, p. 193.

⁶⁶ Drescher, 'Whose Abolition?', p. 160. See pp. 160-162 for Drescher's examples and analysis.

⁶⁷ The Whig *York Herald* stated that 'the Ministers of this country, after all we have done for the abolition of this inhuman practice, [have] made us a party in the revival of it, at a moment when it might for ever have been destroyed.' *York Herald*, 2 July 1814.

⁶⁸ *Sheffield Iris*, 3 July 1814.

⁶⁹ *York Herald*, 9 July 1814.

⁷⁰ *Derby Mercury*, 30 June 1814.

between the 1792 and 1814 petition campaigns. Support in Scotland and the north of England showed a significant decline while the number of petitions raised in the Midland, East Anglia and southern England were proportionately higher in the campaign against the French slave trade than in the campaign for total abolition in 1792.⁷¹ It is not unreasonable to suggest, however, that the circular appeals from London may have initially targeted the south of England. Few of the first 150 petitions received by the Commons came from north of the Home Counties. Since speed was the key, an appeal to towns nearby (and to villages, now districts of London, such as Whitechapel, Hampstead Heath and Hammersmith which all petitioned early) would be a logical tactic. Moreover, the report of the 17th June meeting was not printed in northern papers until the start of July.⁷² By contrast, if one looks at the petitions received in the last two weeks of the campaign there is a higher proportion of petitions from Scotland and the north of England.

Nevertheless, there were important organisational continuities. Campaigning followed the pattern established in 1788 and 1792.⁷³ But, more importantly, individuals involved in the campaigns of 1788 and 1792 often played an influential role in raising the new petitions of 1814. Rev. Thomas Gisbourne assisted the county petition in Staffordshire; Rev. Thomas Scales chaired the Wolverhampton meeting.⁷⁴ Indeed, it is interesting to note that at this time abolitionists involved in the campaigns against the slave trade acted alongside younger men who later became prominent in the campaigns against slavery. The pottery magnates of Staffordshire, who had been involved in the earlier petitions and became more influential in the 1820s and 1830s, requested a public meeting of the inhabitants of their neighbourhood: members of the Wedgwood, Spode, Minton, Davenport and Ridgway families were prominent abolitionists before and after 1814.⁷⁵ The 'committee of requisitionists' at Sheffield included James Montgomery, the radical newspaper editor and agent of the 1792 petition, and Samuel Roberts, one of the principal immediatist abolitionists during the 1820s. Half of those listed became members of the Sheffield Committee in 1823.⁷⁶ Clarkson was able to draw on the support of those who had petitioned in 1814 to

⁷¹ David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991), pp. 65-66.

⁷² For example, it was not reported in the *York Herald* until the issue of 2 July 1814.

⁷³ Of course, inhabitants petitions were raised in the usual way: requisitions were signed and public meetings held, committees appointed to undertake the business of the petition, and influential speeches subsequently printed and circulated. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2 July 1814; *Hull Advertiser*, 2 July 1814.

⁷⁴ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2 July 1814, 16 July 1814.

⁷⁵ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 9 July 1814, 23 July 1814.

⁷⁶ *Sheffield Iris*, 10 July 1814; *Sheffield Mercury*, 26 April 1823.

mobilise efforts against slavery in 1824.⁷⁷ There was, therefore, some continuity of personnel at the local level.

The petitions of 1814 announced that a popular consensus had been reached on the inhumanity and injustice of the slave trade. The prior abolition of the British slave trade and the strength of anti-French sentiment contributed greatly to such an expression of abolitionism. Indeed, the African Institution played on patriotic sentiment by arguing that France's lucky escape had been 'manifestly and signally favoured by Divine Providence,' and that it should not be celebrated by the restoration of a system of robbery and murder.⁷⁸ Thus, it is reasonable to conclude with Turley that this outburst of petitioning does not on its own suggest a '*continuously developing*' social movement: discontinuities in the areas which petitioned, combined with a surge in party-political and patriotic feeling, suggests that this mobilisation was very different in character to those of 1792, 1806 or 1823.⁷⁹ Public opinion was clearly responsive to abolitionist appeals but it did not show any signs of development, merely a defence of the virtue of abolishing the British slave trade. Nor did the abolitionists attempt to extend their appeal to include new targets.⁸⁰ The fact that former slave traders petitioned alongside abolitionists, as in Liverpool, suggests that this campaign was a healing of wounds, a statement of national values and an aspect of Britain's regeneration from the foremost slave trader to the foremost slave emancipator. It was a forceful condemnation of 'that horrible traffic, which we *now* so deeply deplore.'⁸¹ As in the Yorkshire election of 1807, the petitions of 1814 reflected the creation of a competitive humanitarian market in which Whigs, Tories and the people at large fought for the title and the honour of being abolition's heirs.

⁷⁷ See chapter six.

⁷⁸ *York Herald*, 2 July 1814.

⁷⁹ Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, p. 65.

⁸⁰ The only exception I have been able to find is a call on Emperor Alexander to secure both French abolition and to emancipate the victims of 'Russian Slavery' on his return from Vienna: *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 9 July 1814.

⁸¹ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 8 July 1814. My italics.

Part Two

Slavery

Chapter Six

JAMES CROPPER AND THE ABOLITIONIST REVIVAL, 1821-1822.

At the seventh annual meeting of the African Institution in May 1823, the abolitionists lamented their failure to persuade the Congress of Vienna to abolish the slave trade unilaterally. Meanwhile, in the House of Commons, Lord Liverpool's government, under pressure from over 150 petitions, pledged to introduce measures for the amelioration of slave conditions in the British West Indies. These events signalled a transition in abolitionist activity: an end to those diplomatic measures to abolish the international slave trade which had dominated the preceding fifteen years, and the beginning of a revived, resurgent and popular mobilisation against British slavery itself.

The historiography of British abolitionism has paid little attention to this revival.¹ Yet the transition from diplomatic efforts to popular agitation is as important to the history of the anti-slavery movement as the decision made at the same time to widen the abolitionists' aims from the suppression of the slave trade to the abolition of slavery. Diplomatic failures at Vienna and the horrific information plundered from the limited records of slave registration began to turn the abolitionist away from their stagnation. The changing consensus was also fuelled by the expansion of missionary endeavours in the British Caribbean which simultaneously educated the slaves in the Christian religion and the British public in the evils of slavery, as news of harsh conditions filtered back through the transatlantic networks of non-conformist societies.² By 1822, the institution of slavery was beginning to come under scrutiny. In January 1823 the London Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery was formed - provincial corresponding societies were also raised in the following year and a half.

These developments were not simply the result of a changing consensus. It was James Cropper, a Quaker businessman of Liverpool, who examined, questioned and ultimately attacked British slavery from 1821, who impelled abolitionism forward. Cropper was born in 1773 in Winstanley, near Wigan. At the age of seventeen, he was apprenticed to Rathbone, Benson and Co., a successful Liverpool trading house which

¹ James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (1986) and Davis's two articles on James Cropper remain honourable exceptions. D. B. Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1821-23,' *Journal of Negro History* (1960); D. B. Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery, 1824-1833,' *Journal of Negro History* (1961).

² See Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom*, esp. chapter 6.

dealt principally in American produce.³ Here, Cropper's introduction to the anti-slavery world could not have been more extensive. William Rathbone, the senior partner, was second only to William Roscoe in prominence as the town's leading abolitionist. Abraham Binns, with whom Cropper lodged, was a member of the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society, a centre of religious non-conformity and the focus for Roscoe and Rathbone's anti-slavery activity.⁴ Five years later, Cropper became a partner in the company and in 1799 he joined with Thomas Benson to form Cropper, Benson, and Co. By the 1820s, the firm successfully traded in American produce and her ships ran regular trips to New York, full or empty, taking a few passengers with them.⁵ The firm's economic success was bolstered by Cropper's prominent position within the new American Chamber of Commerce in Liverpool which was founded in 1801. Through the Chamber, Cropper assisted Rathbone in his campaign for the removal of the Orders in Council in 1812. More importantly, Cropper became interested in trade with the East Indies and Africa. He became a director in the Liverpool East India Association which, from its formation in 1818, frequently expounded Cropper's own views. Through business connections with the Sierra Leone scheme, Cropper became involved in the antislavery movement.⁶

The revival of the 1820s is significant for three reasons. Firstly, it originated as an economic assault on the protectionist sugar duties by an East Indian trader. The old abolitionists rallied to Cropper's side only after the newcomer had set the movement on an ideological and organisational course of his own choosing. Secondly, these anti-slavery stirrings emanated from Liverpool, the former heart of the slave-trade and still a strong West India place. And, thirdly, it was prompted by a resurgence of West Indian strength. Roger Anstey showed how the abolitionists were able to take advantage of a conjunction of economic and political forces detrimental to the West Indians in 1806 to pass the Abolition Bill.⁷ Now, these forces acted against the abolitionists' design. The West Indian interest in the Parliament of 1820 was numerically stronger than it had been at any time during the preceding fifteen years: their powerful presence in the Commons remained unbroken until the first reform election in 1832.⁸ Moreover, the West Indian lobby was not entirely metropolitan. Key figures within the government, and especially the Colonial Office, were held under the

³ *Dictionary of National Biography*: entry for James Cropper.

⁴ MSS Cropper Papers, Maritime Museum Library, Albert Dock, Liverpool (hereafter cited as MSS 'Cropper papers'), D/CR/11-10: Cropper's certificate of enrolment, dated 12th March 1812.

⁵ See advertisement for Cropper, Benson and Co.'s services. *Liverpool Mercury*, 12th January 1821.

⁶ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1821-23,' p. 244.

⁷ Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (1975).

⁸ Barry Higman, 'The West India 'Interest' in Parliament, 1807-1833,' *Historical Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 49 (1967), pp. 1-19 especially pp. 3-4.

influence of powerful West Indians. John Gladstone, the President of the Liverpool West Indian Association (and father of William Ewart), held sway over two Liverpool MPs, Canning and Huskisson, both of whom had direct control of the emancipation question at different points in the 1820s.⁹ It was primarily the threat of West Indian resurgence, rather than horror at slavery, which prompted the revival of abolitionist efforts and consequently determined the movement's thought and designs.

EARLY ENDEAVOURS, 1821-22 THE EAST INDIAN AND THE SUGAR DUTIES

James Cropper's decision to initiate an attack on slavery was not determined by a timetable of abolitionist action but rather by the activities of the West Indian interest. Early in 1821, the West Indian planters appealed to Parliament for a further increase of the duties on East Indian sugar to counter a fall in their profits. Cropper responded with an article in the *Liverpool Mercury* entitled 'DUTY ON THE EAST INDIA SUGARS, AS CONNECTED WITH THE SLAVE TRADE' which was written as an open letter to William Wilberforce.¹⁰ The letter simultaneously armed the East India interest and the vestigial remains of anti-slavery opinion with an uncompromising economic critique of West Indian slavery. Cropper represented slavery as an institution which was anachronistic in an era of *laissez-faire* 'when enlightened views have almost universally condemned systems of restriction and prohibition in commerce.'¹¹ By so doing, he hoped that both free trade and abolitionism, using a common pool of liberal economic arguments, would make gains at the expense of the slave-holders in the British Caribbean. In this, and subsequent letters to Wilberforce printed in the Liverpool press, Cropper constructed a versatile and wide-ranging economic assault on the institution of slavery of benefit to East Indians and abolitionists alike.¹² His influence was to determine the reorientation of abolitionist thought, for better and worse, throughout the 1820s.

⁹ For John Gladstone's involvement and patronage of Liverpool politics see S. G. Checkland, *The Gladstones - A Family Biography, 1764-1851* (Cambridge, 1971), *passim*.

¹⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 May 1821.

¹¹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 May 1821.

¹² In 1822, Cropper's letters were reprinted in a single pamphlet entitled *Letters addressed to William Wilberforce recommending the encouragement of the cultivation of sugar in our colonies in the East Indies as the natural and certain means of effecting the total and general abolition of the slave trade* (Liverpool, 1822).

Cropper's fundamental contention was that slave labour could not compete with free labour on equal terms and was thus reliant on protective duties for its survival. The relative cheapness of free labour was 'the Great cornerstone on which we build our hopes.'¹³ This truth he had gleaned from his reading of Adam Smith's *On the Wealth of Nations* (1776). While Smith had not explicitly condemned slavery on moral or religious grounds, he did make several remarks which, combined with his overall analysis of the economic system, served to present slavery as an increasingly irrelevant institution. His most famous remark, that slave labour 'is in the end the dearest of any,'¹⁴ was quoted by Cropper in one of his letters. Smith also argued that slavery inhibited innovation:

'Slaves... are very seldom inventive; and all the most important improvements, either in machinery, or in the arrangement and distribution of work which facilitates and abridges labour, have been the discoveries of freemen... In the manufactures carried on by slaves, therefore, more labour must generally have been employed to execute the same quantity of work than in those carried on by freemen.'¹⁵

Cropper used this aspect of Smith's argument in his *Letter Addressed to the Liverpool Society* in 1823 in which he argued that slave cultivation was the equivalent of old 'outmoded techniques of production' and was bound 'to oppose the modern improvements of industry.'¹⁶

As a result of these inherent inefficiencies, the West Indians required high prices to sustain slave cultivation, a system of labour so harsh and intensive that it inhibited the natural increase of the slave population. Cropper reiterated Smith's point: 'Nothing but high prices can ever support the Slave Trade. Nothing but high prices, which cause the overworking of the slaves, can ever render it necessary... Is not this [the plea for protection] a most decided admission, that *their* system of cultivation cannot exist unless the country is taxed to support it?'¹⁷

The high cost of slavery was crucial to Cropper's argument. Smith had noted that 'the planting of sugar and tobacco can afford the expense of slave cultivation. The raising

¹³ MSS Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Public Record Office. No. 1091: Letter from James Cropper to William Roscoe, 14 January 1822.

¹⁴ Adam Smith, *On the Wealth of Nations*, (Everyman Classics folio edition), p.345. Cropper quoted 'the dearest of any' in his letter in the *Liverpool Mercury*, 7 September 1821.

¹⁵ Smith, *op.cit.*, p.177.

¹⁶ James Cropper, *Letter Addressed to the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (Liverpool, 1823).

¹⁷ Smith, *op.cit.*, p.177. My italics.

of corn, it seems, in the present day, cannot.'¹⁸ Cropper believed that cotton, too, had reached that level of prices in the British West India possessions, but that sugar was too much in demand and West Indian produce too well protected by government duties. The key to overthrowing slavery, therefore, was to break down these protectionist barriers and expose slavery to the full force of competition with free labour. Through such a contest, the planters would see the folly of clinging to slave labour and would be forced to adopt less intensive methods of cultivation to counter a fall in prices. This, in turn, would increase the probability of natural reproduction among the slave population and consequently remove the need to purchase slaves through the transatlantic trade. An equalisation of the duties on East and West Indian sugar would lead to the gradual amelioration of the slaves prior to their inevitable emancipation. Eventually slavery itself, even where slaves were treated more like free men, would have to cease for West Indian sugar to compete.¹⁹

Cropper's early economic assault on slavery was framed as a discussion of the financial value of the West Indian interest and was an attempt to convert West Indians rather than to revive moralising critics. Thus he argued that the mitigation of slave conditions would lead to the natural increase of the slave population and remove the expense of costly slave imports. Cropper quoted an anonymous friend returned from North America where 'the Planters said that the fall in price was not entirely a loss to them, for they had less inducement to work their negroes hard, and they would increase faster.'²⁰ To take this quotation at face value would be remarkably naïve (a point not lost on Cropper's critics), but it nevertheless explains Cropper's vision of the system - black slavery mitigated by the market. Cropper also countered the West Indian fear that a fall in prices would prove disastrous by referring to the success of indigo cultivated by 'free labourers' in Bengal. The increase in cotton manufactures following the admission of British cotton free from duties earlier in 1821 was also used to support his claims.²¹ The adoption of free labour was put to the West Indians as a means of making their produce more competitive, a theme which runs throughout abolitionism in the 1820s and 1830s. 'It may now be seen with what foundation my

¹⁸ Smith, *op.cit.*, p.345.

¹⁹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 May 1821: 'There is, I believe, a point still lower where every system of slavery must be given up: has not that point arrived in all our cultivation and manufacture in this country?... Is it not hence fair to conclude, that so long as man bears *any price at all*, production has not reached its lowest point, and so long as he bears a high price, there is at least great temptation for breaking the laws against importation?'

²⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 May 1821.

²¹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 7 September, 18 May 1821; David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, 1987), p. 10.

proposition is charged with the ruin of West Indian Property. On the contrary, I believe it to be its only preservation.’²²

Cropper made great efforts to prove that this was the case. His letters to Wilberforce were illustrated with demographic surveys of North America, reports on slave conditions, and many examples from plantations in the Americas and the East Indies, each indicating that higher productivity could be obtained under less harsh working conditions. A brief description of British sugar consumption in the second decade of the nineteenth century, and a projection based on it for the 1820s, suggested to Cropper that ‘notwithstanding some reduction in the price for the planter, there is abundant room for increased income.’ With a fall in price made up for by the increased consumption resulting from the greater affordability of cheaper sugar and the increased value of the land, ‘which as naturally follows an increased population,’ the West Indian planters could not lose.²³ Furthermore, this evolutionary change in West Indian cultivation would be sufficiently gradual to prepare the slave to become a free labourer: slaves under Cropper’s scheme ‘would never be liberated until they had acquired industrious habits and when so liberated they would soon destroy all motive for the foreign slave trade, by the competition of the cheaper productions of free labour.’²⁴ Cropper effectively argued for the destruction of mercantilist slavery at the hands of *laissez-faire* economics itself. In this way he conformed to the broad thesis of Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944).

As a balance against the mercantilist protection of West Indian wealth, Cropper placed the economic interests of the nation. Cropper was concerned that ‘whatever bounty or protection [the West Indians] may be entitled to receive should be given in a way to produce a national benefit.’²⁵ He calculated that the duties cost the British consumer almost two million pounds per year. But rather than stress the national and personal complicity of all Britons in upholding slavery, Cropper persisted in a purely economic attack. ‘Surely the people of England should not be taxed by keeping up the price of an article which may tend to support this infamous traffic?’²⁶ Cropper’s choice of approach is significant as it proceeded along different lines from other appeals such as abstention which stressed moral complicity. What Cropper succeeded in doing, however, was to develop a contrast between the West Indians on the one hand and the people of England on the other, presenting the duties as a battle between rival personal

²² *Liverpool Mercury*, 7 September 1821.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7 September 1821.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15 February 1824.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 September 1821.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18 May 1821.

and national interests. In so doing, he maintained the connection between national virtue and abolitionism cultivated in the years after 1807 while sacrificing the immediacy of a moral appeal to individuals. As can be inferred from Cropper's attempts to convert the West Indians rather than raise moral pressure, the economic critique was not immediately geared to popular mobilisation.

Cropper was so confident of the truth behind his claims that he did not give serious consideration to compensation. He told Zachary Macaulay, then a member of the East India lobby, that 'the fact and arguments which I have now stated are on the same firm ground as the multiplication table or any other mathematical truth.'²⁷ Cropper was in no doubt that the West Indians would gain from the equalisation but nevertheless added a footnote that if they failed to retain their profits in the years after emancipation, the planters would have a valid claim to compensation. As he wrote in the *Liverpool Mercury*, with regard to the money saved by the British consumer in duties: 'if a part of these pecuniary advantages were given to the planters as a remuneration for losses, which, I believe, are only imaginary, still the country would be greatly the gainer, by the vast extension of its commerce.'²⁸ Again, the moral dimension was submerged beneath economic theorising: at no point was the right of planters, as perpetrators of a moral crime, to compensation questioned. The Liverpool Society as a whole favoured Cropper's line. Adam Hodgson made the same point but in slightly more forceful tones when he insisted that compensation was not an issue 'until they [the Planters] have introduced every practicable improvement into their system of cultivation.'²⁹ Like many other elements of Cropper's economic critique of slavery, the question of compensation was reconsidered in the light of changed circumstances in the early 1830s. But the equation relating international prices, slave conditions, and free trade remained Cropper's pivotal ideological standpoint and was his singular gift to British anti-slavery ideology in the 1820s.

DEVELOPING THE ECONOMIC CRITIQUE

By the middle of 1822, James Cropper had forcefully argued a case for the ultimate extinction of slavery but his perspective had principally been that of an East Indian

²⁷ Quoted in K. Charlton, 'James Cropper and Liverpool's Contribution to the Anti-Slavery Movement,' *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, CXIII (1971), p. 59.

²⁸ *Liverpool Mercury*, 5th December 1823.

²⁹ Adam Hodgson, *A Letter to M. Jean-Baptiste Say, on the comparative expense of free and slave labour*, 2nd edn. (1823).

and not an abolitionist. Cropper's heavy involvement in East Indian trade gave the Liverpool West Indians ample ammunition against him. Thomas Fletcher argued that Cropper was using the slave issue to increase his own wealth: 'the tendency of Mr. Cropper's opinions, if acted upon, would be nothing less than to extend the cultivation of the East by the ruin of the West.'³⁰ But aside from being presented as insincere, Cropper was held responsible for bringing 'a charge against a numerous and respectable class of our fellow subjects, the West Indian Proprietors.'³¹ Of course, Cropper was prepared for criticism: 'Whoever attacks such a deep-rooted evil must not expect an easy path; he must expect to be assailed with the greatest violence.'³² Liverpool in 1821 was still an old West Indian place and in John Gladstone, leader of the Liverpool West India Association, it had a fierce advocate with strong political connections. Ironically, it was as a result of the fierce dialectic between West Indian opposition and Cropper that the economic critique became more explicitly 'anti-slavery.'³³ A second, more positive influence came from the writings of William Roscoe, the Liverpool abolitionist who had supported the Abolition Society in its first assault on the British slave trade.

Cropper's vigorous debates with local West Indians in the pages of the *Liverpool Mercury* and the *Liverpool Courier* widened the scope for his attack. Initially, opponents focused on the precedent set by a free trade measure and on the dangers which could result for the rest of British trade. T. F. (Thomas Fletcher) argued that the abolition of the colonial monopoly could only follow Government measures to admit 'foreign corn and cattle free of duty, repeal the navigation laws, equalise British and foreign shipping... Such I apprehend is the sweeping nature, and such the practical effects, of Mr. Cropper's arguments if followed to their legitimate consequences.'³⁴ By contrast, the West Indian lobby provided 'an exclusive trade,' one which could be regulated and guaranteed and which secured wealth.³⁵ But more significantly for the revived campaign after 1823, opponents quickly rallied to the defence of property. Fletcher wrote that his arguments rested upon 'the chartered rights of the colonies, which cannot be infringed without violating the principles upon which property in general is secured and established.'³⁶ In light of the intransigence of colonial legislatures after May 1823, Fletcher's comments proved foreboding indeed. Already

³⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 5th August 1821.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 25th May 1821.

³² *Ibid.*, 5th December 1823.

³³ As has been noted, David Turley has seen the importance of West Indian arguments in the formation of anti-slavery ideology in the 1780s. David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991), chapter 2.

³⁴ *Liverpool Mercury*, 3 August 1821.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1821.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3 August 1821.

the defenders of slavery were arming themselves with arguments against arbitrary government.

Cropper was perhaps drawn further into the anti-slavery dimensions of the equalisation argument when local opponents began refuting reports of the horrors of slave conditions. Fletcher noted that 'a milder treatment of the slaves prevails... in several instances, schools are instituted for their instruction; the right of baptism is more frequently administered, and some progress has been made in diffusing among them religious principles and feelings.' Twice in July 1821, he insisted that slave conditions were already improving in the West Indies as a consequence of the abolition of the slave trade: 'There are, I trust, the dawns of a brighter day.'³⁷ Ironically, this argument had been put forward by the abolitionists in their first campaign as an expected consequence of abolition but it had now been turned against them to deny the accuracy of their allegations. The defenders of slavery were also clever in conceding that limited abuses existed within the slave trade (and to some degree slavery) and thus turned attention away from the plantations to the mechanics of the solution. In one letter, Fletcher argued that he was no advocate of slavery and believed that gradual preparation was necessary, but a process which he expected to take at least one generation.³⁸ To support his case, he argued that a reduction in the price of sugar would only result in the planter working his slaves harder to regain in quantity that which he had lost in price.³⁹ By careful concessions, the West Indians isolated moral outrage.

Cropper's defence of free labour also pushed the abolitionists towards a more unwelcome line of argument. By contesting the efficiency of slave labour, Cropper drew the abolitionists into a comparison between plantation slavery and what later became known as 'wage slavery,' the poor conditions of working people in Britain. In his first letter to the *Liverpool Mercury*, Cropper noted that a self-supporting family could be maintained for 18s per week while a family in the parish workhouse would cost 21s.⁴⁰ Fletcher's initial response was that 'the Negro village on a plantation is a very different thing from a parish workhouse, and does not admit a comparison with it.'⁴¹ Yet, a little under two months later, Fletcher had realised the possibilities which

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6th July 1821, 31st July 1821.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6th July 1821.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 'The poverty of the master will tend to abridge the slave of his comforts... In this I am confirmed by the opinion of Mr. Baring, a very competent judge. He said lately in the House of Commons, and with reference to Mr. Cropper's notion of this very subject, that it was a fallacy to look for any benefit in the condition of slaves from a reduction in their value.'

⁴⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 May 1821.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6 July 1821.

the comparison held: 'By every account [the slaves] are not worked so hard as the free labourers in England.'⁴² Cropper's comparison of slave with free labour helped to revitalise an important argument in the West Indians' arsenal.

However, the revelation that slavery existed in the East Indies was far more damaging for Cropper. Fletcher took advantage of reports which indicated the existence of poor conditions in the East to which the abolitionists remained blind for many years. It was 'a slavery of another and a peculiar kind - that singular division of society into castes, which forever prevents the son from being anything but what his father was before him.'⁴³ We might suspect that the resonance this issue had throughout British society, where social aspirations and emulation were part of a strengthening middle-class mentality, could not have been more damaging for the abolitionists.⁴⁴ However, there appears to be only a few instances of local abolitionists taking a stand against slavery in the East and West Indies simultaneously.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the argument fulfilled a useful diversionary function. Fletcher attacked the presumed backwardness of the East Indians, perhaps most forcefully in a footnote to one of his letters printed in the *Mercury* of 17th August 1821:

'If we compare the mental condition of the Negroes in the West Indies with that of the Hindoos [*sic*], the former will not suffer by the comparison. Though it must be allowed there is amongst them much ignorance and superstition, we shall not there see crowds of wretched devotees throwing themselves down to be crushed to death under the wheels of the great Idol, Juggernaut, or widow's burnt alive by a fanatical and cruel priesthood, upon the funeral pyres of their husbands. It is not in the West Indies that these enormities are witnessed.'⁴⁶

Despite such forceful expressions of West Indian opposition, and the nature of its pedigree, Cropper remained undaunted.⁴⁷ In July 1822, he wrote to Macaulay again, this time outlining his intention to form a Society for the abolition of slavery in Liverpool. By October, the Liverpool Society for the Amelioration and Gradual Abolition of Slavery had been formed (it was later renamed the Liverpool Society for

⁴² *Ibid.*, 31 August 1821.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 17 August 1821.

⁴⁴ See John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery, 1787-1807* (Manchester, 1995), chapter 1, for a discussion of the middle-class mentality as it relates to abolitionism.

⁴⁵ Few anti-slavery petitions covered more than one campaign concern but of the handful that did most appealed also against the cult of widow-burning in India. The Marazion inhabitants petition of 1829 demanded the abolition of slavery in the East and West Indies and asked for an end to the practice of widow burning. *Journal of the House of Commons*, 5 June 1829. A petition from Bradford was also sent against Sati, independently of the slavery issue but raised at the same time, in 1823. *York Herald*, 26 April 1823; *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 2 May 1823.

⁴⁶ *Liverpool Mercury*, 17 August 1821.

⁴⁷ 'Mercator' turned out to be John Gladstone, the planter and father of the future Prime Minister.

promoting the Abolition of Slavery⁴⁸). In the next six months, Cropper explored in greater detail his economic critique of slavery and subsequently refined it for the anti-slavery cause principally under the influence of William Roscoe, the principal figure amongst Liverpool's beleaguered abolitionists during their attack on the slave trade. A Unitarian and humanitarian philosopher, Roscoe wrote a stream of anti-slavery literature in the 1780s and 1790s and was elected Member of Parliament for Liverpool in 1806, allowing him to speak in the final slave trade debate and to cast his vote for its destruction, albeit in direct opposition to the wishes of his electorate. From 1807, Roscoe was a corresponding member of the African Institution and had entertained a continued interest in the slavery question, although he came to regard the destruction of the British trade as 'little more than an empty sound'⁴⁹ and found himself increasingly submerged in the cross-Atlantic debate over penal jurisprudence.

Cropper, on behalf of the Liverpool Society, wrote to Roscoe in January 1823 to tell him that 'for some time past we have had a small Society here.'⁵⁰ It had always been their wish to enrol his name amongst theirs but they were to be disappointed; Roscoe declined, due to other pressing commitments. Nevertheless, he asked if he could see minutes of the Society's proceedings, from time to time, and sent Cropper a copy of one of his own pamphlets, to show his 'decided concurrence in the views of your society and in order to show that my declining to become a member... is not attributed to an indifference for its success, which will always have my warmest wishes.'⁵¹ Roscoe's pamphlet, *A General View of the African Slave Trade, demonstrating its injustice and impolicy, with hints towards a bill for abolition* (1788), despite being thirty-five years old, greatly caught Cropper's imagination: 'I have read thy small pamphlet and am no less pleased than surprised to read that thy [arguments] made at so early a period of this controversy are so nearly what is now wanted.'⁵² The continuity between Roscoe's propositions and those of Cropper a generation later is remarkable. In the *Declaration of the Objects of the Liverpool Society*, printed in late March 1823, Cropper adopted wholesale Roscoe's plan for amelioration.

Roscoe's plan, written in 1788, proposed wide-ranging legal and social changes in an attempt to 'raise the slave in the scale of society' and to prepare him for emancipation.⁵³ It fully met the Liverpool Society's desire for:

⁴⁸ The society had adopted the new name by the time its *Declaration of Objects* was printed in March 1823.

⁴⁹ MSS Roscoe Papers, No. 6016: William Roscoe to James Cropper, 15 January 1823.

⁵⁰ MSS Roscoe Papers, No. 1091: James Cropper to William Roscoe, 14 January 1823.

⁵¹ MSS Roscoe Papers, No. 6016: William Roscoe to James Cropper, 15 January 1823.

⁵² MSS Roscoe Papers, No. 1092: James Cropper to William Roscoe, 21 January 1823.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

‘some deliberate and gradual process, which should progressively give to the slave the feeling of independence, without the danger of licentiousness; and enable him to perceive, that the necessity of providing for his own subsistence, though less degrading, is not less imperative than that under which he had before compelled to return to his daily task.’⁵⁴

Under the scheme proposed, the personal rights of the slave would be secured through the establishment of English courts and laws in the West Indies: trial by jury, the punishment of whites for the wilful murder of slaves, the admission of slave testimony as evidence and protection ‘from wanton and illegal punishments.’⁵⁵ Similarly, planters were asked to encourage marriage, with exemptions and privileges granted to slave families in proportion to the number of their children, and to provide for religious instruction. Slaves would also be allowed to work as paid labourers on their free days and be given the right to buy their own freedom. To facilitate this great change, Roscoe had proposed an economic measure, a duty on imported slaves to force the planters to encourage natural increase amongst the slave population and to care for their slaves. The duty would have been raised each year until it reached a maximum level in 1800. Cropper wrote with astonishment that the plan would have not only prepared slaves for emancipation but also abolished the slave trade seven years earlier.⁵⁶ In retrospect, it is remarkably close to the plan of apprenticeship adopted in 1833.

With the slave trade abolished and thus the means Roscoe had proposed to encourage the transfer to free labour in the West Indies no longer available, Cropper’s campaign for an equalisation of duties on East and West Indian sugars fell neatly into place. In the *Declaration of Objects* the duties question was not raised directly but the Liverpool Society revealed its intention to build on the work it had already done to prove slavery was a moral and economic fallacy:

‘by demonstrating its dreadful and pernicious effects, as well on the master as on the slave, and even on the moral character and habits of the community at large; its peculiar inconsistency with the principles of Christianity and the avowed spirit of the British constitution, and its long suspected, and now ascertained inefficacy, as being an indispensable, or even necessary instrument, of agriculture or commercial gain.’

⁵⁴ *Declaration of the Objects of the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (Liverpool, 1823).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Cropper believed that his debates in the local press in 1821 and his pamphlets had succeeded in proving that ‘the adoption of free labour will more than compensate for the difference that at present subsists in the expense of producing the articles of Colonial and foreign commerce, in the different parts where such cultivation takes place.’ ‘It is with this view,’ he noted, ‘which unites the extinction of an odious abuse with the best interests of the Colonial proprietors, that this Society has engaged in its present labours.’

The *Declaration of Objects*, written under Roscoe’s influence, shows how Cropper’s economic critique was placed firmly within the context of existing anti-slavery thought and traditional abolitionist tactics. In contrast to his letters in the Liverpool press, Cropper developed a stronger moral and religious attack on slavery which ran parallel to his economic arguments. He challenged the view that it was better to force an individual to work than to leave a plantation uncultivated. That was ‘a proposition which acknowledges no law but that of the strongest, which violates every Christian and moral duty, and which it is therefore impossible that any one, whose ideas of right and wrong are not perverted by the narrowest views and the most selfish considerations, can be forced to defend.’⁵⁷ Similarly, the *Declaration* made it clear that, although the Liverpool abolitionists regarded compensation to be valid in cases of proven loss, the moral repugnance of slavery was in no way condoned by any indemnification granted to the planters. ‘If [slavery’s] abettors could demonstrate that the continuance of it is indispensable to their interests, and that it could not be relinquished without a great inconvenience, and a certain loss, it would not in any respect diminish the exertions of the Society, or change its views.’⁵⁸ Through arguments with the West Indian lobby and consultation with Roscoe, Cropper’s economic critique widened to include strong statements of moral principle around which popular mobilisation could coalesce.

At this stage, Cropper’s arguments forced upon the slaves and West Indian planters a very gradual evolution from a coerced to a free labour society. This gradual process, above freedom itself, was of critical importance. ‘Though I might respect the feelings of a man who should at once emancipate his slaves, yet how much more deserving of esteem would he be whose feelings were governed by judgement, and held them in slavery until he had prepared them to make emancipation a benefit.’⁵⁹ Moreover, Cropper’s attention to the interconnectedness of British trade alerted him to the disastrous effect which an abstention from the use of slave-grown cotton could have

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 7 September 1821.

upon employment in Lancashire in which he was also involved.⁶⁰ Cropper's approach was fundamentally concerned with gradualism and the preparation of the slave for the responsibilities of freedom. As such, it was increasingly sidelined in the later 1820s as abstention and demands for immediate emancipation spread.

JAMES CROPPER AND THE HEGEMONIC THESIS

At this stage, it is worth considering Cropper's personal motivation. Like many Quakers, Cropper was a highly successful businessman and was well versed in economic theory. As such, he fits neatly into the category of the anti-slavery capitalist who features prominently in the most contentious sections of David Brion Davis's celebrated work *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (1975).⁶¹ For Davis, abolitionism became the preserve of a capitalist elite which advocated the spirit of benevolence and absorbed Smith's political economy as a means of reconciling their Christianity with economic success. This elite was exemplified by the transatlantic community of the Society of Friends, a group also concerned with the problems of labour discipline in the emerging capitalist industrial order. Through the Quakers and other middle-class entrepreneurs, abolitionism became a broad social reform movement, one which, consciously or unconsciously, stressed the values of laissez-faire and thus reflected the needs and values of the emerging capitalist order. A polarity was set up by the abolitionists between progress through free labour and stagnation through slavery. Abolitionism effectively exhorted a vision of the social hierarchy which desensitised workers to exploitation within the domestic free-labour market. In essence, antislavery used Smith's concept of a natural harmony of interests to ensure social stability during a period of profound economic and political change. James Cropper would seem to be of prime importance to the general discussion of capitalism and antislavery if not central to the 'hegemonic thesis.' Cropper was also the subject of some of David Brion Davis's earliest writings on abolition.⁶² Yet, despite Cropper's firm advocacy of laissez-faire principles, his zealous attachment to the *Wealth of Nations*, and his almost unique status as official publicist of the economic critique, James Cropper appears only once in the chapters which constitute

⁶⁰ Letter from James Cropper to Joseph Sturge, 14th July 1827 in Anne Cropper (ed.) *Extracts from letters of James Cropper, for his grand-children* (1850). This volume was privately printed and does not have page numbers. Cropper shipped slave-cotton on the Liverpool to Manchester railway, of which he was a director.

⁶¹ The significant sections singled out by Davis are the fifth, eighth and ninth chapters of *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, New York, 1975).

⁶² Davis, 'James Cropper, 1821-23,' and 'James Cropper, 1824-33.'

Davis's key statements on the hegemonic thesis, and then only as the exception to a general rule.⁶³ The omission of Cropper from Davis's magisterial work serves to underscore the latter's reliance on figures largely associated with the campaign in Parliament.

The extension of free trade to the East Indies was clearly of concrete economic benefit to Cropper. He also accepted Smith's proposition that self-interest was the principal motivating force in human affairs. Moreover, in coming to terms with his temporal success, Cropper had looked directly to Adam Smith for guidance. But in examining Cropper's aims and motivation, and more generally those involved in a conscious plan for abolitionist social control, one should not ignore the role of religious belief. Cropper was a Quaker and remained a rather conservative one to his death. Despite the challenge of a new evangelical impetus within the Society of Friends in the mid-1830s, of which many of his friends and family approved, Cropper's traditional beliefs remained firm - in fact, they were strengthened.⁶⁴ Davis contends that, for Cropper, self-interested economics *was* his motivation: Smith's *Wealth of Nations* 'provided a nearly cosmic justification for business enterprise and reconciled duty with profit.'⁶⁵ At one level, this is clearly correct. Cropper and the Society of Friends as a whole struggled for decades to balance their worldly ideal with a membership which was wealthier per head than that of any other sect in the late eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Their worldly success, and that of Cropper in particular, could be justified by accepting Smith's argument that their unhindered self-interest would benefit a greater number than mere actions of benevolence or humanity.

However, it is clear that, if the Society of Friends appreciated Smith's ideological weight being thrown behind them, they differed in their opinion of charity and favoured other methods for addressing social inequalities. Far from allowing unhindered self-interest to reign among themselves and their employees, the Quakers continued to actively encourage donations and charity work, protectionist measures in themselves.⁶⁷ Cropper is a fine example of one who ploughed an immense amount of his personal fortune into charitable causes and also urged others to see the social

⁶³ Cropper appears twice in other sections but does not feature in his central charge of abolitionist social engineering.

⁶⁴ See Anne Cropper, *Extracts from the Letters of James Cropper* (1850).

⁶⁵ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1821-23,' p. 244.

⁶⁶ James Walvin, *The Quakers - Money and Morals* (1997), part II, pp. 43-120, *passim*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, especially chapters 8 and 12.

responsibilities of having wealth.⁶⁸ Early in 1822, having begun his endeavours, Cropper noted:

‘some friends think that my exertions on this subject are to promote my own interests and on that account I have not given the subject impartial consideration... I have neither wish nor intention to add one more shilling to my property. I have already much more than I can use... In increasing my property I should only increase my responsibility.’⁶⁹

His own self-interest had changed from a quest for economic gain to a quest for personal salvation. When congratulating his sons on their business acumen, he warned both that it was difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven. And in selecting investors for his railway enterprises, he deliberately chose those who would most benevolently use their accumulated wealth, and reminded them to be liberal in their contributions to anti-slavery.⁷⁰ The worldly success of the Quakers could not be justified simply by appealing to economic laws - this, after all, was a matter of personal salvation on which they would be divinely judged. Self-interest was not just an economic phenomenon. By encouraging the religious duties of benevolence and paternalism in an era which saw the erosion of these traditional values, the Quakers clearly did not unequivocally lead a ruthless capitalist vanguard. Instead they helped to ease the transition into *laissez-faire*, preserving elements of protectionist benevolence in the process. Indeed, as Davis has noted elsewhere, anti-slavery ‘bred a new sensitivity to social oppression.’⁷¹

Thus Cropper’s motivating self-interest (and that of successful Friends more generally) was not purely economic but also religious. The Quakers sought religious salvation. They faced strict material punishments for overstepping the ethical boundaries of the Society of Friends: just like the ‘impartial spectator’ of Smith’s *Moral Sentiments*, the Yearly Meeting reflected the norms of their Society as a whole and made clear its approval or disapproval. We must not fail to appreciate that the Society of Friends, more extensively than any other religious group, was capable of regulating and judging the actions of its own members. The Quakers had issued clear religious strictures against slave-owning or slave-trading among its members for many years, before it took the final step of demanding that Friends discontinue all such activities. The penalty for refusing was expulsion, a serious threat which suggested to those outside the Society of financial irregularity or incompetence on an

⁶⁸ Letter from James Cropper to Joseph Sturge, 31 August 1830, in Anne Cropper (ed.), *Extracts from the letters of James Cropper*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ D. B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, (1975), p. 467.

unconscionable level. In this way, the Quaker network went one stage further than Smith's impartial spectator - not only did it dictate ethical norms for all Quakers, but it had the ability to confront moral failings among its membership with dire penalties in cases which would not be considered before criminal law. These strict religious dictates and the Yearly Meeting's power to enforce them ensured that the *Wealth of Nations* could not give Cropper or his fellow Quakers leave to vent their commercial greed.

We must therefore also bear in mind that Cropper's reading of Smith was influenced by his Quaker beliefs. In his early works, these parallel influences are clear. 'Had commerce been carried on with enlarged and enlightened views of self-interest, and especially if united with motives of benevolence and humanity, how would knowledge and civilisation have marked the steps of Europeans, and have been extended from the coasts to the interior of Africa!'⁷² There is also a noteworthy semantic shift in Cropper's work as he converted Smith's secular concept of the 'invisible hand' into God's 'all powerful and unseen hand.'⁷³ Cropper was keenly aware not just of the *Wealth of Nations* but also *Moral Sentiments*. That self-interest was the key he was certain, but he believed that it must always be unified with imaginative sympathy and moral concern. Cropper regarded benevolence as the *purpose* of wealth.⁷⁴ He insisted upon the necessity of charity and paternalistic actions - themselves protectionist measures in violation of the principles of the *Wealth of Nations*. But he also saw the primacy of God's economic laws and the inevitable glorious results of free trade.

By approaching Cropper's motivation from the perspective of his religious beliefs and those of his sect, we can appreciate the importance of Providence in anti-slavery thought. Cropper's letters on his actions in the cause reveal his sense that God's work was enacted through individuals such as himself. 'I humbly trust that the glorious purpose of the everlasting God will not be frustrated, but that he will work by many or by few as he has done so far.'⁷⁵ Economic laws were merely extensions of God's will: equalisation was 'the means which an allwise Creator has in the nature of things appointed for the destruction of this abominable system.'⁷⁶ And His will was acting towards a perfect providential design. In Cropper's mind, God's design was *synonymous* with Smithian economics.

⁷² Anon. (James Cropper), 'Impolicy of Slavery' in *Liverpool Mercury*, 31st October 1823. My italics.

⁷³ Anne Cropper (ed.), *op.cit.*

⁷⁴ Letter from James Cropper to Joseph Sturge, 31 August 1830, in Anne Cropper (ed.), *op.cit.*

⁷⁵ Anne Cropper (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 36.

⁷⁶ Davis, *Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution.*, p. 248.

FORMATION OF THE LONDON SOCIETY

James Cropper's endeavours in the anti-slavery cause were not to be confined to the realms of theory. David Brion Davis carefully outlined Cropper's role in the crucial formative period of the Anti-Slavery Society.⁷⁷ In 1822, Cropper became increasingly interested in reviving the abolitionist cause and urged the East India lobby and the abolitionists to question the fairness of Parliament granting further economic protection to the British West Indies. In February 1822, less than a year after he first raised the amelioration question, Cropper wrote to Zachary Macaulay to urge him to unite the friends of abolition against the West Indian appeal for protective duties and insisted that the abolitionists needed to understand the economic issues involved.⁷⁸ Cropper's first tangible success came in the published report of the African Institution's sixteenth meeting, which stated that the country was maintaining slavery through the protective duties benefiting West Indian produce.⁷⁹ Two months later, following the granting to the West Indians of direct importation rights into continental Europe, Cropper informed Macaulay of his intention to form an anti-slavery society which was committed to attacking the economic protection which sustained West Indian slavery.⁸⁰ In the meantime, he used his influence in the Liverpool East India Association to see the institution adopt the relationship between the equalisation of the sugar duties and the extinction of slavery.⁸¹

In August 1822, the Quaker Yearly Meeting resolved to petition Parliament for the abolition of slavery. It is surprising that historians have not recognised the parallel activity of the Society of Friends in the two years prior to the establishment of the Anti-Slavery Society as they have agreed on the contribution made by the Quakers to the first abolition society.⁸² From 1820, the Society of Friends renewed its appeals to its members on the slave trade issue. The Yearly Meeting recorded that 'this notorious traffic is still carried on to a lamentable extent' and resolved to organise a sub-

⁷⁷ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1821-23.'

⁷⁸ 5 February 1822, James Cropper to Zachary Macaulay, BM Add. MSS, 41,267 A, fols. 102-103, referred to in D. B. Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1821-23.' *Journal of Negro History* (1960), pp. 241-248.

⁷⁹ African Institution, *The Sixteenth Report of the Directors of the African Institution, 10th May 1822* (1822)

⁸⁰ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1821-23,' p. 247 and p. 249.

⁸¹ K. Charlton, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

⁸² Betty Fladeland, however, notes the efforts made by Quakers from 1820 to abolish the international slave trade in 'Abolitionist Pressures on the Concert of Europe, 1814-1822,' *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 38 (1966), pp. 355-73.

committee to procure and diffuse information ‘most eligible to awaken the interest of Friends and to give them an opportunity of contributing in a satisfactory manner to promote the great object of the total abolition of the slave trade.’ The initial report of the sub-committee, read in November 1820, was transmitted to the Quarterly monthly meetings ‘for the general information of Friends’ from whom it urgently solicited subscriptions.⁸³ The Quakers focused on abolishing the foreign slave trade and purchased tracts from individual authors and the African Institution which they then had translated into French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch.⁸⁴ But by the autumn of 1821, the same sub-committee had also printed and circulated copies of the African Institution’s sixteenth report and Clarkson’s *The Cries of Africa to the Inhabitants of Europe* to the Monthly Meetings across Great Britain.⁸⁵ In February 1822, the sub-committee resolved to send 150 copies of a pamphlet containing information on the continuance of the slave trade to Isaac Hadwen of Liverpool, a friend of James Cropper and subsequently a member of the Liverpool Society.⁸⁶ Two months later, Cropper became involved in the Quaker sub-committee.⁸⁷ Over the summer months, the sub-committee provoked discussion of the slave trade in the provincial press.⁸⁸ By August 1822, the religious network of the Society of Friends had once again been alerted to the slavery issue and a fund had been established. On numerous occasions throughout the 1820s, this fund saved the Anti-Slavery Society from bankruptcy.⁸⁹

Cropper was spurred to action by the Yearly Meeting’s decision and moved forward with his plans for the formation of a new abolition society. In October 1822, he founded the Liverpool Society for the Amelioration and Gradual Abolition of Slavery, the first of its kind to be formed in the British Isles. Cropper, Hodgson and other members of the Society began to write to friends of the cause for their support. They decided to proceed with caution, perhaps fearing the same sort of reprisals faced by the Liverpool abolitionists thirty years previously: ‘I am quite prepared to expect that the public papers would be all shut against us and though so much has been said in some of the Reviews of the horrors of slavery as it now exists, I have little expectation that many of them will notice my letters or if they do it may be to abuse *me*.’⁹⁰ On

⁸³ MSS ‘Minute books of the Meeting for Sufferings Committee on the Total Abolition of the Slave Trade,’ 2 vols. 1820-1829 (hereafter cited as MSS ‘Quaker Committee, 1820-32, I’), 1829-1832 (hereafter cited as MSS ‘Quaker Committee, 1820-32, II’). MSS Quaker Committee, 1820-32, I: 1 December 1820.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 May 1821.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 August 1821 and 12 November 1821.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 February 1822. Cropper had already written to Macaulay on the 5th.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 13 April 1822.

⁸⁸ *Kendal Mercury*, 29 June 1822, features a circular printed address from the Society of Friends against the continuance of the slave trade.

⁸⁹ The importance of the Quaker fund is discussed in chapter 9.

⁹⁰ Cropper to Macaulay, 12 July 1822, quoted in K. Charlton, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

23rd October 1822, Cropper received the sanction of William Wilberforce. 'I rejoice to think,' wrote the Yorkshire MP, 'that the seed is sown, or rather that the plant has taken root, from which, I doubt not, abundant and good fruit will be delivered by God's blessing, before it be very long.' But Wilberforce also urged their wariness:

'I think you are quite right in being cautious whom you admit into your society: for, especially at the outset of a new institution, it sometimes happens that a prejudice is conceived against it altogether from its containing the names of one or two persons who are obnoxious to public prejudice and who may be supposed likely to give a tincture to its proceedings.'⁹¹

This point would be fully appreciated in January 1824 when one member of the Liverpool Society publicly resigned and attacked Cropper's economic ideas in the local press much to the delight of the local West India Association. But in the beginning, the Liverpool Society had a closed membership on which Cropper could rely. In January 1823 it had fourteen members, many of whom were business associates. Three were Cropper's commercial partners (the two Rathbones and Robert Benson) and six came from the Liverpool 'abolitionist families' of Hodgson, Hadwen, Binns, and Smith, names common also to the Roscoe Circle.⁹² As befitted their caution, the Liverpool Society continued the work that began with Cropper's *Letters to William Wilberforce* (which they collected and printed as a pamphlet in 1822) rather than holding lectures or formulating petitions. As was the case in the 1780s, 1810s, and in the mid-1830s, lack of reliable information was a key problem. The Liverpool Society therefore sought:

'to use its best endeavours to obtain from foreign parts, and particularly from the West India Islands and America, the most extensive and correct information as to the condition and consequences of personal slavery... so as to point out the best and most efficacious methods for the progressive emancipation of the slaves.'⁹³

By January 1823, the Society's proceedings had 'hitherto been very little,'⁹⁴ yet despite this they had amassed a great number of overseas contacts, not least the leaders of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in France and those of the Manumission Society in New York, and had accumulated information against the slave trade. At the same time, Cropper informed Roscoe that the Liverpool Society had 'reason to expect a meeting would take place about the end of March and a

⁹¹ MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/4-3: William Wilberforce to James Cropper, 23 October 1822.

⁹² The names are listed by Cropper in his letter of invitation to Roscoe, 14 January 1823, MSS Roscoe Papers, No. 1091, *op.cit.*

⁹³ Liverpool Society, *Declaration of Objects*.

⁹⁴ MSS Roscoe Papers, No: 1093: James Cropper to William Roscoe, 27 January 1823.

Society be formed in London.⁹⁵ The statement was modest for Cropper had urged the formation of a London Society since the preceding July.

The relationship between the Liverpool and London committees is unique in the history of the anti-slavery movement. Although Manchester's radicals organised anti-slavery petitioning slightly in advance of London in 1787, they did not exercise as much influence over the 'national' movement as the Liverpool Society in the 1820s and 1830s. In mid-Summer 1822, possibly at the Yearly Meeting of Sufferings in London, Cropper, Clarkson, Macaulay and William Allen agreed on the raising of a national non-sectarian campaign through regional societies. In September, Macaulay began writing to 'old warriors of the slave trade campaign, and plans were under way for raising funds, recruiting members, collecting and publishing information.'⁹⁶ The Liverpool Society was created as the first step in the movement but Cropper made it clear to Macaulay that he looked to the capital for leadership.⁹⁷ He asked Macaulay again to form a society: 'if you can form an association if ever so small in London it will be a very great help to me but I know it's difficult to make a beginning.'⁹⁸

In the autumn and winter of 1822, a core council of abolitionists was brought together in London and on 31st January 1823, the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions was formed. It is fair to say that the revived Society drew heavily on Quaker efforts.⁹⁹ Almost half of those Committee members listed by April 1823 were Quakers, many of whom had served on the Meeting for Sufferings sub-committee. However, the new Anti-Slavery Society committee had a proportionally larger non-sectarian evangelical membership than the first Quaker-dominated Abolition society.¹⁰⁰ Though Cropper was not present at the first meeting in the King's Head Tavern, perhaps no other supporter had been more influential in the revival of the campaign. In his *Letters to Wilberforce*, Cropper had extended the assault from the slave trade to slavery on carefully reasoned economic grounds. In the East India connection he found new supporters for the cause. And through the Liverpool Society, Cropper had set the precedent for numerous other anti-slavery societies across the country. In the following years, his efforts were to prove no less important in the revival and mobilisation of provincial support.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 1091: James Cropper to William Roscoe, 14 January 1823.

⁹⁶ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1821-23,' *op.cit.*, p. 252.

⁹⁷ Cropper to Macaulay, 12th July 1822, quoted in Davis, *op.cit.*.

⁹⁸ Cropper to Macaulay, 21st October 1822, quoted in Davis, *op.cit.*.

⁹⁹ William Allen, *Life of William Allen*, 3 vols. (1846), vol. II, p.326. Of a private meeting for the formation of the Society, held on 28th January, Allen noted: 'Samuel Hoare was appointed treasurer, and a large committee was also appointed, the majority of whom are Friends.'

¹⁰⁰ MSS Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Society, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, 5 vols. (1823-1838), Brit Emp S 20 E2/1-5. See first entry in E2/1.

Chapter Seven

THE CAMPAIGN REVIVED, 1823-1824.

PRESSURE FROM WITHOUT

The London Anti-Slavery Society issued a prospectus of its aims among old friends of the cause within two weeks of its formation. Unsurprisingly, this document was reminiscent of the rhetoric of the first and interim campaigns against the slave trade. The Society's aim was explicitly gradual: to mitigate the slave's sufferings with a view to preparing him for his eventual emancipation. Its principal author was Zachary Macaulay, the editor of the *Christian Observer*, who brought the Society's evangelical, proselytising zeal to the fore. The Committee avowed its desire for the moral regeneration of the pagan slave. 'What sense of moral obligation can he [the slave] possess who is so shackled with respect to every action and purpose, as to be scarcely an accountable being?' The planters, and arguably the uneducated slaves, were seen as national enemies:

'The time, we trust, is at length arrived, when they will no longer be permitted to *impede the progress of civilisation*, to set the bounds to the glory and prosperity of the Empire, to stain the character of our country, and to outrage the Holy Religion by which we profess to be guided.'¹

These ideas of national reinvention and of moral regeneration appeared at a time when Britain was experiencing a post-war economic boom. Emerging from the spiritual decay and radicalism of the Peterloo years, middle-class reformism and the desire to heal national wounds found a stronger voice both inside and outside Parliament. Lord Liverpool's 'Liberal Toryism' reflected the increased currency of 'liberal' ideas in political discourse while the economic dynamism of the early 1820s brought Smithian-Ricardian laissez-faire to the status of a fashion.² It was partly for this reason that the Anti-Slavery Society emerged from debates over the West Indian sugar monopoly: the prospectus too mirrored the socio-economic circumstances of the time. Nevertheless, it also contained a very precise, evangelical world view, one which can easily be traced back to the campaign against the slave trade. The amelioration of the slave's conditions served the dual purpose of civilisation and national repentance. It was part of the moral purification of the British nation and a measure to protect

¹ Anti-Slavery Society, prospectus, no date. (c. February 1823).

² John Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1996), pp. 56-58.

against the nation's destruction from a vengeful God. This was the basic message of anti-slavery, one that permeated the full fifty year period of mobilisation.³

In the prospectus's slim four pages, the tactics and internal organisation of the Anti-Slavery Society were outlined. The Society proposed to secure the mitigation and gradual abolition of slavery by diffusing pamphlets and articles throughout Britain, lobbying Parliament and opening international correspondence to accumulate evidence and information. These were the same measures to which the Abolition Society first committed itself. However, the new Anti-Slavery Society planned to launch its campaign immediately with a widespread mobilisation of popular support. From the first, it advocated 'the formation of similar and auxiliary associations in all parts of the United Kingdom, and the establishment of a regular system of communication with such associations.' To accomplish this, the Anti-Slavery Society formed five regular sub-committees. The publications committee, at this early stage, naturally had the largest membership, consisting of ten of the most prominent names in the cause. While publications controlled the content of official pamphlets, the second committee, for the Periodical Press, collated attacks in the newspapers, and the third, Foreign Correspondence, set about accumulating evidence for the first two. Another sub-committee was established to oversee the Society's finances. The largest task, however, awaited the committee for Home Correspondence. This committee, it was noted:

'will find abundant employment in first opening a correspondence with known friends of the cause in all the principal towns of the United Kingdom, with a view to the formation of co-operating institutions, and then transmitting to them, from time to time, the information which it may be useful to diffuse in their respective circles. They will also have to carry on whatever committees may be requisite, with a view to Parliamentary petitions.'⁴

The time at which the Anti-Slavery Society first contacted provincial sympathisers is unclear. The first circular issued by the home correspondence sub-committee was the address of the Society in April 1823.⁵ But already news of the abolitionist revival had spread widely. Newspaper reports announced the creation of the Anti-Slavery Society in February. London abolitionists contacted friends and sympathisers in the country.⁶ However, the London Society was not the only body to initiate this nationwide

³ See remarks made about divine judgements in the early pamphlets outlined in chapter 1.

⁴ MSS Brit. Emp S 20, E2/1-5 'Minute Books of the Committee on Slavery,' (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1-5'). E2/1: 19 February 1823.

⁵ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 9 April 1823.

⁶ Samuel Roberts letters, Sheffield Archives. No. 35: Letter from William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 25 March 1823. Even at this early date, Wilberforce urged the necessity of raising petitions.

revival. As we have seen, the Society of Friends had been alert to the cause since the Yearly Meeting of 1820 and from 1822 the Quarterly Monthly Meetings had been recruited to the cause. Meanwhile, the public efforts of James Cropper and the Liverpool Society also drew attention to the cause. The significance of winning over Liverpool to the abolitionist camp was not lost on provincial abolitionists. Samuel Tuke's resolution on the formation of a committee at York mentioned that Liverpool 'once so deeply interested in the vile traffic of human beings, and which so powerfully opposed its abolition, had now rendered itself conspicuous by its exertion, to mitigate and to abolish slavery altogether.'⁷ In early May 1823, Matthew Forster and John Fenwick, sympathisers in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, wrote to the president of the Liverpool Society, not London, and informed him of their desire 'to form their society as nearly as circumstances will permit upon the plans adopted at Liverpool.'⁸

With the distribution of small pamphlets and the prospectus, public opinion was reawakened across the country but we must not assume that it was in an advanced state. As late as mid-April 1823, only a week before the petitions began to flood in, James Stephen told the London Committee that he had 'begun to despair that the attention of the public would be again sufficiently awakened.'⁹ Public opinion, as before, had to be cultivated. Public meetings and petitions were encouraged to lead the way. In March, the first petitions were presented to Parliament, one from the Society of Friends and another from the inhabitants of Southwark, the borough nearest to Westminster.¹⁰ Both built on personal acquaintance with the individuals on the Committee, especially the Quakers. By early April, the London Committee was also in contact with two provincial societies, both of which had grown from Quaker roots. Cropper's Liverpool Society was the first. The second association was the Swansea Society headed by Joseph Price, a Quaker industrialist who owned the neighbouring Neath Abbey Iron Works. Price was to become one of the most prominent abolitionists in Wales.¹¹

The distribution of pamphlets was critical. As in 1787, the London Society relied on a list of correspondents and personal acquaintances. In total, thirty-eight counties in England were contacted and supplied with a portion of the 50,000 copies of the

⁷ *York Herald*, 3 May 1823.

⁸ MSS Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Public Record Office, No. 1565: Matthew Forster and John Fenwick to William Roscoe, May 6th 1823. William Roscoe was honorary president of the Society in Liverpool although he was not very active in the cause.

⁹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 16 April 1823. Letter from James Stephen to London Committee.

¹⁰ *House of Commons Journals*, 27 March 1823.

¹¹ Gwynne E. Owen, 'Welsh Anti-Slavery Sentiment, 1790-1865: a survey of public opinion,' MA thesis, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (1964).

Society's *Brief View of the Nature and Effects of Negro Slavery* (1823). Glasgow and Edinburgh, Dublin and Belfast and Price in Neath Abbey near Swansea were to receive pamphlets and undertake distribution for Scotland, Ireland and Wales. A week later, Cropper's Liverpool Society was asked 'to undertake the correspondence with and transmission of Pamphlets to Cheshire, Lancashire, Yorkshire and all parts north of them and also Ireland and the United States of America.' At once, the pioneering work of the Liverpool Society was recognised: only Liverpool and later the Female Society for Birmingham were to share organisational responsibilities for England with London.¹² The English county towns, the capitals of Scotland, Ireland and Wales, and Liverpool, heartland of the slave trade, became the nodes of official anti-slavery organisation and agitation. In the capital, the Society lobbied for Parliamentary support. Copies of pamphlets which countered West Indian accusations were sent to Members of Parliament. Members of the African Institution also received copies of the *Brief View* as did the London Institution and other reading rooms.¹³

The abolitionists had chosen to lead from the first with a resurgence of popular mobilisation. Clarkson informed provincial supporters that Thomas Fowell Buxton, the new leader of the abolitionists in Parliament who succeeded Wilberforce on account of the latter's old age, would introduce his first motion on slavery on the 15th May and asked that petitions be raised to coincide with the debate. Pamphlets by Clarkson and Wilberforce were added to those already distributed and local abolitionists were asked to supply the local press 'with extracts from any of these works, or Articles written for the purpose.' The London leadership were uncertain of the effect these petitions would have but nevertheless encouraged local activists to circulate information once more and did not rule out the possibility of repeat petitioning.¹⁴ Regenerating the old network was thus a priority. One newspaper claimed that 'the religious and benevolent, both in this city and in other parts of the kingdom, will not require much urging to such a labour of love - such a Christian duty.'¹⁵ Nevertheless, some areas found raising support to be problematic as information on the subject had not yet permeated very far. The editor of the *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* said that 'a false belief has very generally existed, that slavery had ceased, or is in a gradual state of abolition.'¹⁶ In part, this was a case of the abolitionists becoming victims of their own previous successes: anti-slave trade pamphlets had often argued that the destruction of slavery would be the natural

¹² MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1. 23 April 1823.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 30 April 1823.

¹⁴ Anti-Slavery Society circular, n.d. Begins: 'We have now to inform you that MR. BUXTON'S MOTION is deferred till the 15th inst.'

¹⁵ *York Herald*, 19 April 1823.

¹⁶ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 9 May 1823.

consequence of abolition. The timing of the petitions added a further complication. Circulars and pamphlets had only recently been distributed to the provinces but petitions were desired for the 15th May. The York abolitionists could only obtain 900 signatures before they had to send their petition to the Commons. By contrast, the Yorkshire petition for reform, raised a month earlier, was over 380 feet in length and contained 17,050 signatures.¹⁷ Petitions from Yorkshire which were organised later in the campaign appear to have been more respectable: the Leeds petition gained 9,400 signatures, Huddersfield 5,096, and the small village of Rawdon collected 600 signatures.¹⁸ In total, the Commons received 225 petitions appealing for amelioration in 1823; 158 were presented in time for Buxton's motion.

The petitions of 1823 expressed a number of different concerns. The inhabitants of Newcastle-upon-Tyne asked for the amelioration of slavery such 'as shall raise the unhappy subjects of it from their present condition of wretchedness and degradation to the enjoyment of the blessings of civil freedom and Christian light.'¹⁹ The Rawdon petition urged the immediate moderation of slavery and its gradual abolition.²⁰ Others called for slavery's 'total' abolition but added no time scale. A small number, for example the petitions from Sleaford and Uxbridge, called for the indemnification of the planters and urged Parliament to consider the safety of the white population in their deliberations: compensation for the planters was a condition of the petition from the borough of Southwark.²¹ However, the majority of petitions pressed for measures of partial emancipation or gradual amelioration *in advance* of freedom. None of the petitions listed in the *Journal of the House of Commons* mentioned 'immediate' emancipation. Indeed, public meetings across the country elaborated the horrors of slavery and the dangers of immediatism in almost equal measure.²²

While petitions differed in their precise requests, the depiction of slavery as a stain on the national character was common currency at the anti-slavery meetings of the 1820s. Many joined the Sheffield inhabitants in noting that the perpetuation of black slavery from generation to generation constituted 'a national crime of the greatest moral malignity,' on which would result in the 'just indignation' and retribution of God.²³

¹⁷ *York Courant*, 19 April 1823. *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 9 May 1823.

¹⁸ *York Herald*, 10 May 1823.

¹⁹ *Journal of the House of Commons*, 7 May 1823. The Ovingham petition made similar appeals: 26 May 1823.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 May 1823.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 27 March 1823.

²² *York Herald*, 3 May 1823. The Recorder at York forcibly argued that 'immediate total abolition... might be attended with the most evil consequences,' but was reprimanded for not detailing the horrors of slavery more thoroughly.

²³ *Sheffield Mercury*, 3 May 1823.

Slavery was commonly depicted as ‘a state of things, so little honourable to our native land.’²⁴ Meanwhile, the French, Portuguese and Spanish were singled out as slaving nations and attacked for transporting slaves into the British West Indies.²⁵ The omission of the British from the list suggests that historical amnesia was already setting in. The precedent of the abolition of the British slave trade provided an opportunity for nationalist posturing: Britain would not be ‘outdone by any other nation in deeds of justice and mercy.’²⁶ But it is worth noting that the nationalism of the abolitionists, though competitive, was not of a virulent, xenophobic character. If categorised, it fell neatly into the risorgimento tradition, the liberal belief in the sovereign right of all nations (all people) to their own self-determination.²⁷ The classic battle ground of risorgimento nationalism in the 1820s, Greek freedom from the Turks, attracted prominent anti-slavery support. The Society of Friends in York and ‘the Distressed Greeks of Scio’ advertised for donations to aid the ongoing struggle against Turkish rule. The *York Herald* commented that they observed in the list of subscribers the names of Wilberforce, Buxton and Macaulay. The issue, indeed, became a matter of competitive humanitarianism. In another issue of the *Herald*, an anonymous author lamented the limited support for the Greek cause in York, a city which he categorised as ‘the supporter of beneficence and humanity, and the amelioration of the condition of our fellow creatures in every quarter of the globe.’²⁸ York faced competing claims for its benevolence.

The 1823 petition campaign was also contemporaneous with a petition campaign against the West India monopoly. That there was an overlap indicates the importance of Cropper’s economic critique in reviving the cause. In April 1823, a society for gradual abolition was formed in Derby under the patronage of John Garton Howard, Vicar of St. Michael’s, who subsequently became the local society’s secretary. The Derby Society initiated contact with the London Committee but had been active in procuring and distributing pamphlets before that time, the most prominent of which (written and published by Hodgson and Cropper) had questioned the profitability of slave labour. Reflecting this, the Derby Society organised two petitions, one appealing for gradual abolition and another urging an enquiry into the relative duties of East and West Indian sugars, ‘the two subjects being intimately connected.’²⁹ Howard and his

²⁴ *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 2 May 1823.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9 May 1823.

²⁶ *York Herald*, 3 May 1823.

²⁷ See Peter Alter, *Nationalism* (1989), pp. 24-54, esp. pp. 28-34, in which he discusses a typology of nationalism.

²⁸ *York Herald*, 8 February and 21 June 1823. The campaign to assist the Greeks was organised by a sub-committee of the Quaker Yearly Meeting. William Allen was one of its foremost exponents. William Allen, *Life of William Allen*, 3 vols. (1846), vol. II, p.323-325.

²⁹ *Derby Mercury*, 9 April 1823.

coadjutors, Messrs Richardson and Handford, the local printers, may have resolved on two petitions as a response to local West Indian feeling. In a letter to Sir Henry Fitzherbert, a local West Indian proprietor, Revd. Howard noted that 'some persons connected with the West Indies, who have considered that their interests ought to deter them from joining in the latter [the duties petition], have been ready to sign the former.'³⁰ In Derby, the sugars issue had complicated matters, even at this early stage, but had been the focus of their local revival.

Derby was not the only place to petition for an inquiry into the sugar duties question. Twenty similar petitions were presented to the Commons in May. A comparison of these with the returns for anti-slavery petitions indicates a rather one-sided interaction of interests. Of the twenty places which petitioned for the equalisation of sugar duties or an inquiry into them, thirteen also petitioned in favour of anti-slavery measures. Eight of these double petitions came from the same signatories, for example, both the Derby petitions were sent by the inhabitants. The lack of a mercantile connection or commercial interest in the East Indies in these places, combined with the sparse information available, indicates that these eight places may have attacked the preferential duties as part of their overall attack on slavery. To these eight petitions can be added the petition from Burslem in the Staffordshire Potteries which was organised by abolitionist families.³¹ Of the remaining five places which petitioned on both the sugar and slavery issues, the connections are unclear. In Birmingham and Liverpool, Joseph Sturge and James Cropper provided an organisational link between the two campaigns but there is no evidence that their chambers of commerce officially supported the anti-slavery campaign. Cropper had already discovered that, though the anti-slavery and East Indian interests overlapped, not least in his own business interests, the East Indians were not willing to hoist their flag on the abolitionist ship and insisted upon a strict segregation of funds for both campaigns.³² The two remaining anti-slavery petitions from Nottingham and Rossendale came from the inhabitants and, in both cases, merchants were not listed as specific petitioners.

The seven petitioning bodies which petitioned on the sugar question but *not* against slavery had clearer links with the East India lobby. Each one came from commercial

³⁰ Fitzherbert Collection, Derbyshire Record Office. D239/F8496: Letter from J. G. Howard to Sir Henry Fitzherbert, 23 April 1823.

³¹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 3 May 1823. The Burslem manufacturers chose to petition for equalisation as a commercial body because it would be of 'benefit to the exportation of earthenware, &c. from the Staffordshire Potteries' but the names Wedgwood, Minton, Ridgway, Spode, etc. were all connected with the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society and the petition of 1814 (Hanley Library, MSS 'Minute Book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society').

³² D. B. Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1821-23,' *Journal of Negro History* (1960), p. 251.

groups with substantial interests in extending eastern trade. One came from the United Company of Merchants interested in trade to the East Indies and another from European and 'native' merchants of Calcutta. Kirkcudbright, Manchester, Limerick and Leith all had established trades with the East Indies. The last petition on the sugar duties alone came from the Hallamshire Cutlers. Though they famously petitioned Parliament in 1792, renouncing their self-interest in the continuation of the slave trade, they did not petition against slavery in 1823 as an interest group. Instead many prominent Cutlers signed a separate inhabitants petition sent to Parliament from Sheffield.³³

These results downplay the any great connection between the anti-slavery and East Indian sugar interests. East Indian merchants were far less likely to sanction the campaign against slavery officially. None of the commercial or mercantile bodies which petitioned on the duties issue also petitioned against slavery. But the result of the linkages between the two campaigns was a confusion of the anti-slavery issue and one which local and national opponents were quick to turn to their advantage. In October 1823, *Blackwood's Magazine* vehemently lashed out at the abolitionists, condemning the humanitarian posturing of a new band of self-interested East Indian abolitionists, by which they meant Cropper.³⁴ The editor of the *Macclesfield Courier* also condemned 'the holy humbug - the East Indian *saint* and *sugar alliance*... who prostitute the most sacred feelings to the most selfish purposes.'³⁵ However, the East Indian sugar question would not disappear. Instead, it became an important aspect of popular mobilisation in the second half of the 1820s.

Although only 225 petitions were raised, just one quarter of those raised seven years previously, we must stress that the London abolitionists were not dissatisfied with this response from the country. After all, on 15th May the Government formally accepted the need for ameliorating the conditions of slavery. Wilberforce noted that 'the country takes up our cause surprisingly... the petitions, considering the little effort, very numerous.'³⁶ But as the London Society's ultimate aim was 'the acquirement [sic] of an unexampled number of petitions to the next session of Parliament,'³⁷ how much more could be accomplished by superseding this 'little effort'? Recognising the need for more systematic mobilisation, Thomas Clarkson toured the country once again in the following months.

³³ *Sheffield Mercury*, 3 May 1823.

³⁴ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, October 1823. Article entitled 'The West Indian Controversy.'

³⁵ *Macclesfield Courier*, 27 March 1824.

³⁶ Sir Reginald Coupland, *Wilberforce* (Oxford, 1923), p. 396.

³⁷ Thomas Clarkson, 'Speech used at forming of Committees, 1823-24,' in Sources from the Huntington Library, Microfilm Reel 1 (Adam Matthews Publications).

MOBILISING SUPPORT: THE TOUR

Clarkson's role in the revived anti-slavery campaign has largely escaped the attention of historians.³⁸ Even his most recent biographer devotes only four pages to Clarkson's activities for the Anti-Slavery Society in the 1820s and 1830s.³⁹ However, as in 1788, Clarkson's tour of 1823-24 was the most important element in a campaign to cultivate abolitionist sentiment across the country. The failure to appreciate the tour and its consequences is the result of two distinct features of the historiography. Firstly, the petition campaigns of 1823 and 1824 are usually considered to be one continuous petition campaign.⁴⁰ This has downplayed the significance of Clarkson's tour which was a response to the former and the instigator of the latter. Secondly, the 1820s as a whole has been a period neglected by historians, with a few exceptions.⁴¹ The originality of the first Abolition Society's tactics has resulted in the view that the mobilisations of the 1820s were a mere re-running of the patterns of the anti-slave trade campaign on a wider geographical scale.⁴² Both of these features of the historiography have served to ride roughshod over a crucial period of abolitionist activity which is rich with its own distinctive contours and problems.

By June 1823, half-way through the Parliamentary session, 180 petitions had been presented to the Commons on the slavery question and the Government had officially patronised the cause. But the abolitionists, fearing a relaxation of efforts on the part of the Ministry, were keenly aware of the need to maintain and extend their 'pressure from without.' On 27th May, the London Society issued a circular which discouraged complacency: 'whatever measures of association, petition, or contribution were deemed necessary previous to those Proceedings are no less imperiously asked for at the present moment.'⁴³ The Committee decided to call for a public meeting in the winter but also debated the state of popular opinion and the necessity of reviving the

³⁸ Clarkson's tour in the 1820s is not mentioned in Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery - British Mobilisation in Comparative Perspective* (1986), nor is it prominent in David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991).

³⁹ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson - A Biography*, 2nd edn. (York, 1996), p.161-164.

⁴⁰ Drescher categorises the petitions of both years as the campaign of 1823 (*Capitalism and Antislavery*, p.58, 89) and as the campaign of 1823-24 (p. 90). Turley refers to the campaign of 1823-24, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, p. 66.

⁴¹ James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (1986), chapter 7; David Turley, *op.cit.*, *passim*. Drescher's *Capitalism and Antislavery* covers the 1820s but his focus is primarily on the campaign against the slave trade and the years immediately preceding emancipation.

⁴² Drescher, *op.cit.*; Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery* (Manchester, 1995).

⁴³ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 27 May 1823.

cause nationwide. On 6th June, James Cropper formally wrote to the Committee to advocate a new anti-slavery tour. The natural choice for agent of the Society was Thomas Clarkson and it seems clear that Cropper, writing from Clarkson's home (Playford Hall near Ipswich) had discussed the matter with him in advance.⁴⁴ Cropper personally donated £500 to the funds to enable the tour to take place but stipulated that this offer was 'made in connection with the proposed journey.' Convinced of the necessity of the tour, Cropper was determined that his donation would not be appropriated for other purposes.⁴⁵

The tour was designed to capitalise on existing abolitionist sentiment throughout the country and to extend it. Clarkson and Cropper were both sensible to the need for auxiliary societies, especially in areas which had remained quiet in 1823. This point is of wider historiographical significance as the campaigns of 1823 and 1824 are customarily considered as one. The abolitionists regarded the break between sessions as a break between campaigns. In total, Parliament received 225 petitions calling for action against slavery in 1823 - less than half the total for 1792 and a mere quarter of that for 1814. Historians, however, have not felt the need to question the continuity of public opinion as a 'structural component of abolition' and have instead relied on the radically expanded geographical range of the petition campaigns of 1792 and 1814 to suggest similar exponential growth of support during subsequent mobilisations.⁴⁶ Only David Turley has argued for a 'new start in many places' in 1823-24 but does not take into account the added discontinuity between these two years.⁴⁷ Together, the sum total of places petitioning in 1823-24 supersedes the previous highest total in excess of 800 for 1814, and thus the impression is given that slow and steady growth was maintained. But the combination of the petition returns for these two years in the historiography belies a more important shift in the nature and extent of the campaigns and provincial mobilisation.

Parliamentary records clearly indicate that the years 1823 and 1824 should be treated as separate campaigns. Firstly, mobilisation in the years 1823-24 occurred in two distinct stages: March to July 1823 and February to June 1824. This six month break was not a result of Parliament's winter recess, as this began at the end of November 1823. Secondly, the petitions of 1823 were intended to press for government action, or at least to establish the Ministry's commitment to the cause, which was formally given

⁴⁴ Wilson concurs in this assessment, *Thomas Clarkson - A Biography* (1989), p. 162.

⁴⁵ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 9 June 1823.

⁴⁶ Drescher, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

⁴⁷ Turley, *op.cit.*, p. 66. Turley recounts that Clarkson's tour resulted in 225 petitions, but 180 of those had been received by the Commons before he began it. In fact, Clarkson's tour may have resulted in almost 600 petitions.

in the resolutions of 15th May 1823. After that, the claims on the legislature had to be different. Thirdly, the way in which the 1823 campaign had been conducted was very haphazard. Almost one third of the petitions (67 out of 225) arrived after Buxton's motion, and the last few were received two months late, partly on account of late contact between London and the provinces. The last petitioners of 1823 do not appear to have taken the government's resolutions into account or reacted against them. Most came from the United Associate Secession Church of Scotland. In short, the petition campaign of 1823 was an ill-organised and poorly orchestrated affair at the national level and was based largely on a circular plea at very short notice. But for the fact that it was the largest post-Vienna mobilisation, the abolitionists would have had great difficulty in claiming to have kept the national voice.⁴⁸

Moreover, an important qualitative shift occurred between 1823 and 1824 in the demands and intentions of the petitioners as a result of Canning's resolutions, the slave revolt in Demerara and, more importantly, the activities of the London Society. As we have seen, the 1823 petitions desired action, a first step towards the gradual destruction of slavery. The Government's concurrence in the resolutions of 15th May sapped the traditional imperative towards repeat petitions: government intransigence. Clarkson's speech to local sympathisers, which he put to paper at the beginning of January 1824,⁴⁹ proposed new but equally important reasons for repeating the call to Parliament. It was now the duty of abolitionists to help by:

'fortifying the Government against yielding too easily, or more than they would wish, to the Clamours and misrepresentations of the West India opposition... They are labouring to frighten Government and to deter it from following up those generous Resolutions which were put upon the Journal of the House of Commons in May last.'

More importantly, petitions would 'have the effect of preventing *Delay, Equivocation, and attempts at Deception* on the part of the Colonial Legislatures.'⁵⁰ In many cases, these reasons were sufficient but in others, such as Macclesfield, Derby and Chester, local supporters and opponents were less satisfied with this unconventional use of the right to petition. The abolitionists were not suggesting a radical departure in the right to petition but a more banal one.

⁴⁸ Index of *House of Commons Journals* for the years 1815-1823.

⁴⁹ The dating is not given but Clarkson mentions his recent attendance at the formation of the Ipswich Committee, which took place on 1 January 1824. Similarly, his comments on West Indian opposition and their 'virulent publications' put this after December 1823 when Clarkson temporarily retired from the tour due to overwhelming opposition. He also mentions the 'next session' of Parliament which opened on 3 February 1824.

⁵⁰ Thomas Clarkson, 'Speech used at forming of Committees, 1823-24.'

By separating the two petitioning years, one obtains a greater sense of the significance of Clarkson's tour and its effects. Before leaving London, Clarkson and the committee members of the Anti-Slavery Society organised a list of names, much as had been done in the earliest days of the Abolition Society. Cropper urged that the list should contain the names of known friends of the cause and those who received circulars but also 'names which we may obtain from the Bible Society, the Church Missionary Society, and the Wesleyan Methodists.'⁵¹ Macaulay was a committee member of the Religious Tracts Society and editor of the *Christian Observer*, and it is likely that he drew on these contacts for the list.⁵² Clearly, networks of religious affiliation were added to the pre-existing network of abolitionist sympathisers. The completed list contained 597 names and was intended as a blueprint for rapid mobilisation.⁵³ Clarkson set out for those counties which had been relatively quiet in 1823, especially Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire which Cropper identified as prime targets.⁵⁴ The tour eventually took Clarkson over 3,000 miles during which he assisted in the creation of nearly 200 local committees.⁵⁵

In the first part of the tour, Clarkson found evidence of the inadequacies of the London Society's mobilisation of 1823. In many places, pamphlets had not been received, perhaps in part due to a confusion between the London and Liverpool Societies over their respective fields of activity.⁵⁶ Clarkson felt that the poor distribution of pamphlets had been the cause of a failure to petition at Woburn, while in neighbouring Newport Pagnell, the campaign had been hindered because local sympathisers had received too few.⁵⁷ Perhaps more alarmingly, he also heard that there had been no attempts to raise petitions in at least two places because the London Society 'in their Circulars, had not stated their object.'⁵⁸ However, in many places Clarkson found established support. In towns which had petitioned in 1823, he approached the principal coadjutors. Clarkson also found friends from the first campaign against the slave trade. The Revd. Joseph Barnes in Berwick-upon-Tweed

⁵¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 9 June 1823.

⁵² Viscountess Knutsford, *Life and Letters of Zachary Macaulay* (1900), p. 236.

⁵³ Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom*, p. 151.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ This, and all details for Clarkson's tour, comes from his *Diary of a Tour for the Anti-Slavery Society, 1823-1824*. National Library of Wales, MS 17984 A (hereafter cited as MSS 'Clarkson's diary'). This information taken from Clarkson's notes on inside front cover.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 July 1823. The Leeds Committee had not received any copies of the *Thoughts*. Clarkson believed Leeds to have been supplied by Liverpool but appeared unsure as to who was supposed to contact them.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 July 1823.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* The quotation refers to Leighton Buzzard (5 July 1823). In Northampton, a local sympathiser insisted that he never knew petitions were sought for (8 July 1823).

had previously moved a petition for the abolition of the Slave Trade, the editor of the *Hull Rockingham Gazette* was also an old friend of the cause, and Stapylton of York had organised the petition of 1814.⁵⁹ In some places, committees had already formed, perhaps in response to the Society's circulars of early 1823: in July and August, at the close of the 1823 petition campaign, Clarkson found established committees in Wellingborough, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Some auxiliaries were already quite large and well organised. The Millfield committee consisted of twenty-three men and had been formed under the patronage of the Duke of Northumberland. In 1823 it organised six petitions from the surrounding area and expected fourteen more in the next session. The auxiliary had also engaged in printing its own copies of the *Brief View* and had started distributing them.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the level of active support for emancipation at the beginning of Clarkson's tour was patchy at best and it was imperative that the shortcomings of the society's circular addresses were rectified by Clarkson in person.

Clarkson's overall approach was highly pragmatic. Typically, he contacted one of the names on his list and made certain of their commitment. If he was dissatisfied, he changed the Society's contact to another. In Carlisle he found that, by sending official correspondence to one abolitionist 'the Petition got into Low Hands, whereas by the other address, the Mayor, Clergy of the Establishment &c. would have been prominent and the others would have joined it.'⁶¹ The process of guaranteeing reliable support was crucial. Clarkson was then introduced to gentlemen of standing within the community, mostly members of the clergy but also Corporation officers if the town was incorporated. By getting 'half a dozen Persons of Respectability to sign a Requisition to the Mayor,' Clarkson virtually guaranteed a public meeting, and signatures from 'People of all Descriptions.'⁶² It was fundamentally important to gain the support of local officials, or at the least their promise not to intervene against the abolitionists. Clarkson either canvassed individuals or arranged a meeting with all the interested parties together, usually at the house of a local contact, where he spoke on the evils of slavery, their cause and the necessity of petitioning. As in his earlier tours, he also attempted to recruit local newspapers to the cause.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 and 12 August 1823. *York Herald*, 3 May 1823.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 August 1823.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1823. On 17 July 1823, Clarkson replaced his Boston contact, Haynes, with Isaac Reckitt, a more zealous local Quaker.

⁶² *Ibid.*, entry for 18 July 1823. Clarkson's contacts were invariably prominent individuals of some social standing. In Birmingham, the abolitionists were also involved in the city's musical festival (4 October 1823) and in Liskeard many members of the committee were engaged at the Mayor's feast day (21 October 1823).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1823. In Doncaster, he was pleased when Sheardowne, the editor of the *Doncaster, Nottingham and Lincolnshire Gazette* offered half a column per week to the cause.

The social status of active abolitionists was much the same as before. A large segment of Clarkson's contacts, once they had been approved, came from the local professional classes. The groups most frequently listed were lawyers followed by bankers and doctors. Very rarely were industrialists or manufacturers listed, although there were two prominent Quaker examples, Joseph Price of Neath Abbey Iron Works and Josiah Wedgwood jnr. in the Potteries. However, it was clergymen and dissenting ministers who overwhelmingly dominated the ranks of local sympathisers. Clarkson's list of contacts from the Wesleyan, Bible and Church Missionary societies found him instant support in many places. At Ledbury and Bridgewater, Clarkson recruited members of the Bible Society, while in Kettering the local Bible Society as a whole offered to organise much of Northamptonshire.⁶⁴ The Edinburgh Society regularly used the rooms of the Bible Society for their meetings, and Clarkson co-operated with a correspondent of the Church and Missionary Societies in Congleton.⁶⁵ But the older, more established Quaker network also played a part. In July 1823, shortly after beginning his tour, Clarkson spoke to Friends at Ackworth who undertook to 'promote our object in distant Parts of the County.'⁶⁶ Individual Quakers also came forward: in the North East, three Quaker banking dynasties, all related by marriage, co-operated in the cause.⁶⁷ In the North West, Cropper's Liverpool Society divided up Lancashire with Isaac Crewdson's Manchester Committee. Isaac, a Quaker evangelical and the pamphleteer who began the Beaconite controversy in the 1830s, was the uncle of William Dillworth Crewdson, Kendal's principal abolitionist and a close friend of Clarkson, Buxton and Cropper. Even when Quakers were not present at meetings, local supporters assumed they would assist: the Chelmsford Committee automatically added to their ranks the names of three Quakers who were absent at the Coggleshall Monthly Meeting.⁶⁸ In this way, Clarkson drew on pre-existing networks of religious affiliation.

The abolitionists sought cross-denominational co-operation in the cause, mostly to stress the non-sectarian or 'Christian' appeal of anti-slavery. Bible Societies were already engaged in this type of activity. By the 1820s, there were around two hundred Bible Society 'auxiliaries' across the country, each committed to the printing and

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 October, 14 October and 10 July 1823.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 August and 14 September 1823.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 July 1823. He also spoke to members of the Society of Friends when he sought to organise agitation in several towns across Cheshire and Staffordshire (10 September 1823).

⁶⁷ These were the Backhouse and Pease families of Darlington and the Gurneys of Norwich.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1 December 1823.

distribution of the scriptures without sectarian considerations.⁶⁹ But individual clergymen and ministers were also supportive. During his tour, Clarkson found that the vast majority of dissenting ministers he approached approved of the London Society's aims and readily volunteered their services. Members of the Established Church were also willing to assist more often than not. Also, as we might suspect, dissenting ministers and lay churchmen, neither prominent in incorporated government, could readily find common cause on the Christian issue of anti-slavery.⁷⁰ In almost two thirds of the places Clarkson visited between June 1823 and February 1824, religious groups had no objection to working together against slavery. In some cases, previous petitions which had originated with dissenting groups had been signed by the principal Clergy and Corporation.⁷¹ But in a number of cases, especially where the cause was just emerging and the Church of England was proportionately strong, such as Lichfield, Clarkson had some difficulty in getting Anglicans to work with dissenters and to create a non-sectarian committee. In none of the English cases listed in the diary did dissenters refuse to co-operate with Anglicans.

In many towns there existed deep-rooted tensions between dissenters and churchmen which threatened any successful abolitionist mobilisation. At Oakham, Clarkson found that 'no committee can be formed because [the] Church will not harmonise with dissenters.'⁷² At Lichfield, too, he received a 'sad report of the Cathedral & its influence on the Inhabitants, so that none will stir till they know the Minds of the Cathedral.'⁷³ In these cases of Anglican intransigence, Clarkson had four possible responses. In the first case, he could abandon all hopes of forming a committee, although the need to do so was rare. Secondly, he could rely on his contacts to work as best they could, sometimes even as individuals carrying around petitions, as he did at Oakham.⁷⁴ In this way, he would least aggravate the local High Churchmen. Thirdly, he could press a body of lay Anglicans and dissenters to petition anyway, as he did at Lichfield. In these cases, he counted on the Church not to discountenance the cause. Having failed to convince the Archdeacon of Lichfield, Clarkson urged the local abolitionists to bombard the town with pamphlets in the period immediately prior to the raising of the petition at a time when the Archdeacon was absent: 'the Cathedral,

⁶⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, Michael D. Coogan (eds), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 80-81.

⁷⁰ MSS Clarkson's diary, 1823-24: see 5 July 1823 (Stamford), 13 July 1823 (Grantham) and 22 July 1823 (Leighton Buzzard).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11 November 1823. This was the petition from Salisbury in 1823.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 13 July 1823.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 17 September 1823.

⁷⁴ Clarkson relied on the support and efforts of William Clark, a Quaker and one of the Society's correspondents.

though it would not assist, *would not oppose*.⁷⁵ The fourth, marginally more extreme case would be to accept the offer of a committee which consisted overwhelmingly of dissenters: 'If the Corporation should be sluggish, the Dissenters will take on a petition & with them many of the Lay Churchmen.'⁷⁶

The diary of Clarkson's tour clearly indicates that raising petitions for the next session was the Society's principal aim. If dissenters, privately on their own or publicly in groups, could guarantee petitions in areas where the formation of cross-denominational committees proved impossible then Clarkson was ready to rely on them. But assuring that petitions would obtain the maximum possible support - that they would be 'respectably signed' - was equally important. Questions of respectability and practicality underpinned Clarkson's negotiations. Respectability came from balance, especially a balance between religious sects, and the number of signatories. Clarkson suggested that the Whitehaven Committee of twelve dissenters and two churchmen would 'be made more respectable' by the recruitment of a few more churchmen.⁷⁷ In practical terms, too, courting the local Anglican squirearchy was necessary. Dissenters could not always guarantee the large public meetings which increasingly became the focus for abolitionist mobilisation because they were typically excluded from Corporations. The overwhelming presence of dissenters in the campaign could sometimes jeopardise not only the formation of committees but also the raising of petitions. In Stockport, Clarkson found that the attempt by local Independents in 1823 to raise an inhabitants petition had met with firm opposition from local Church and Party magistrates.⁷⁸ As a result, obtaining Anglican support was crucially important, as was appealing to the local Corporation or leading political figures.

Ensuring a political balance proved to be just as time consuming for Clarkson. In Carlisle he was almost defeated by a strong hostility between the local parties, although a small body of individuals, who refused to form an official committee, were able to raise a petition in 1824.⁷⁹ Even among this group Clarkson had to be careful, especially in assigning responsibility to one or other party. 'Some contrivance must be made to divide the books' between the two abolitionists in question. '[It] is a Case

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 September 1823. The Lichfield petition, nevertheless, did not appear.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 13 July 1823. Clarkson was reassured at Grantham that the dissenters would also be able to obtain the signatures of the lay clergymen despite the hostility of the High Churchmen in the area. *Ibid.*, 22 July 1823.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 August 1823.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 12 September 1823.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1823.

between Whig and Tory.’⁸⁰ In places where the political balance was contentious, abolitionist sympathy usually fell on the side of the Whigs. At Peterborough, Clarkson lamented that the local doctor who assured their former petitions, ‘would assist us in every possible way, but I wished, as he was a known Whig and a Lord Fitzwilliam, to put the affair equally in the hands of Tories.’⁸¹ In North Lincolnshire, he found that the Whigs and Radicals would assist but the Tories would not.⁸² Further north in Hull, he obtained the support of the Whig *Rockingham Gazette* but also tried to recruit the Tory *Hull Advertiser* to the cause.⁸³ Nevertheless, it appears from the Diary that issues of political imbalance were far less contentious than those of religious difference, perhaps reflecting the closing of the political distance between the two parties during the years of Lord Liverpool’s ‘Liberal Toryism.’ With the help of correspondents in Lincoln, Clarkson drew up a list of prominent individuals, who, if they would sign a requisition, would unite all the parties in the town. And though the Vicar of Middlewich in Cheshire complained that the Committee consisted of too many Whigs, he nevertheless agreed to become a member of their society.⁸⁴ Ultimately, should Clarkson’s endeavours have failed to create a politically balanced committee, he was willing to accept reasonable offers which would guarantee petitions. In Boston, he took the support of a Whig-dominated committee:

‘Seeing the Mayor and Clergy would never become Members of a Committee nor originate any thing themselves if any of the opposite party had a Hand in it, I thought it most advisable to accept the offered committee because [it] would not only ensure a Petition from Boston in which many of the Church would join and 3 Magistrates, but by its adverts ensure petitions from Donington, Solkingham, Tattershall, Wainfleet, Burgh, Spilsby, Horncastle, Alford, Louth, &c.’⁸⁵

These were the problems Clarkson faced when trying to form new committees but his efforts were rewarded. In this first part of his tour, Clarkson had formed over one hundred and fifty auxiliary committees. These committees took on greater responsibilities than those which had operated during the campaign against the slave trade. As the London Committee’s desire was to obtain ‘an unexampled number of petitions,’ auxiliary societies and local committees were encouraged to undertake the distribution of pamphlets, organisation of correspondents and co-ordination of activity in a wide catchment area. The Nottingham committee of eight men agreed to

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 13 July 1823.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 18 July 1823.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 6 August 1823.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 10 September 1823.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 16 July 1823. Clarkson’s choice paid off: only Alford and Solkingham failed to petition in 1824.

undertake all of the county.⁸⁶ The York Committee resolved to find correspondents and create auxiliary committees throughout the North Riding for the Parent Society. The Hull Committee agreed to do the same for the East Riding.⁸⁷ In Leeds, a permanent society was formed which agreed to correspond with London 'and agents in the Towns which had not petitioned,' although later they complained to the London Society that Clarkson had misunderstood them in supposing that they undertook the whole of the West Riding.⁸⁸ Much of the West Riding, which was rapidly urbanising, had sufficiently large principal towns for the organisation of activity at each town, unlike the rural East Riding and North Yorkshire. In the campaign against the slave trade, the diffusion of sentiment and petitioning activity into the rural periphery had not been sufficiently extensive to warrant this type of organisation. In the 1820s, however, the London Committee appears to have sought as complete and extensive a participation as possible and instructed local societies to excite their neighbourhoods to that end.

The business of organising agitation across large, principally rural areas required that local societies communicate with each other. The Manchester Committee agreed to 'unite' with the Liverpool Society and divide the towns of Lancashire between themselves as they had in the campaign against the slave trade.⁸⁹ Other areas without prior experience of such activity, such as Gloucester and Tewkesbury, divided their part of the country between them also.⁹⁰ The distribution of pamphlets allowed for further connections to be forged between committees. Pamphlets, circulars, and later *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporters* were received on behalf of small or rural committees by abolitionists in larger market towns which were traditionally centres of distribution.⁹¹ The organisation of agitation throughout Scotland was undertaken by Glasgow and Edinburgh where auxiliary societies had been formed in the summer of 1823, though neither had progressed far in their business. Both societies were to reprise their role from the first campaign but again their influence was limited. Edinburgh organised its Committee along the same lines as the London Society, creating sub-committees for correspondence, publication and finance.⁹² The Glasgow Committee was chaired by Dr. Macgill, Professor of Theology at the University of Glasgow. With fellow academics, he designated areas of the west coast for each

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 24 July 1823.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 August 1823, 5 August 1823.

⁸⁸ MSS Clarkson's diary, 1823-24: 30 July 1823; MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 20 June 1824.

⁸⁹ *Clarkson's Tour, 1823-24, Part I*, 11 September 1823.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 October 1823.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1823. Richard Bodalys in Wellingborough received tracts for Kettering and the northern districts of Northamptonshire.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 15 August 1823.

attending member of the Committee and left the rest of Scotland for Edinburgh.⁹³ Soon after, smaller societies emerged in cities such as Aberdeen, Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy and many of Scotland's market towns.

By February 1824, Clarkson's efforts had established a network of corresponding societies which had been alerted to the need to petition in 1824. But events in the West Indies and the actions of the West India lobby had a damaging effect which rapidly echoed throughout the country. The West India Committee responded to the spontaneous petitioning of 1823 by launching critical attacks on the anti-slavery lobby through its own regular newspapers. At the same time, the early garbled reports of an insurrection in Demerara, which appeared to have been sparked by the recent discussions in the Commons, threatened to damage the abolitionists' case. The petitions which were presented to Parliament from the end of February 1824 were raised more systematically and methodically but in very different circumstances.

DEMERARA AND AFTER: THE 1824 MOBILISATION

Before embarking upon an analysis of the 1824 campaign it is essential to consider three developments which occurred during the 1823 session: Canning's counter-resolutions, West Indian anti-abolitionist literature, and the Demerara Insurrection.

The Government's patronage of the anti-slavery cause from 15th May 1823 undeniably sapped the strength of popular activity across the country, or at least brought it directly into question. Waiting on Lord Liverpool's ministry to bring in their own measures, provincial abolitionists had less urgent reason to renew their petitions to Parliament. During his tour, Clarkson had attempted to overcome this malaise by explaining that petitions were needed to support the government's measures. But this reorientation of the purpose of petitioning was not universally welcomed. In Cheshire, one newspaper editor described the abolitionists as the *destroyers* of liberty:

'They have converted a most useful engine of influential control over the government, into a mere fool's bauble, which any impudent mountebank may shake at his pleasure; and by prostituting an instrument which should convey the grave opinions of the people of England, by employing it upon every paltry occasion, by rendering it the organ of every silly speculation, they have done all in their power to divest us of one of the best securities for

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 20 August 1823.

our liberties. They have, in short, made such indiscriminate use of this right, that in nine cases out of ten, when the Sovereign has opened his ear to what has been called the “voice of the people,” he has been stunned by the braying of an ass!’⁹⁴

Qualms about the use of petitions in the same manner were expressed by abolitionists themselves throughout the 1820s.

The abolitionists also came under criticism from the West Indian lobby who launched their own campaign in the aftermath of the 1823 petitions. Attacks on the abolitionists increased during the course of Clarkson’s tour. In September, two regular West Indian newsheets, the *John Bull* and *Voice of Jamaica* were founded and printed virulent attacks against the abolitionists and exaggerated reports of distress among the West Indian planters.⁹⁵ In October, Clarkson lamented that these newspapers had extended their influence ‘every where.’⁹⁶ Worse still, the respectable *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* also joined the attack on the abolitionists in the same month. An article on ‘The West Indian Controversy’ contested that the Anti-Slavery Society was merely a reinvention of the African Institution which it suggested had been discredited by discoveries that the British slave trade had ceased. *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* concern was that philanthropic societies could make claims without proof and then evade criticism in this way. ‘Is such conduct worthy of British statesmen? Are these restless, inconsistent, unreasonable mortals, the proper guides for the English mind?’ Of Wilberforce and Macaulay, it was said, ‘nature and education have qualified them for vestry meetings and tavern dinners’ rather than influencing the course of politics. In fact, if we consider the timing of the article, the charge was probably raised as a response to the Anti-Slavery Society’s appeals for subscriptions which had been distributed in September. It was the lack of accountability of these ‘great money-collecting Associations’ which concerned the author. Now that the abolitionists had repeated their appeals to the country despite the government’s pledge, the *Edinburgh Magazine* felt determined to take the matter out of the hands of the ‘dreaming enthusiasts.’ The direst consequences were to result from provoking the issue: ‘they will convert these [slaves] at once into a set of lawless banditti, revelling in blood... On every account, therefore, we are most anxious that Mr. Wilberforce and his associations would be persuaded to pause.’⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *Macclesfield Courier*, 27 March 1824.

⁹⁵ MSS Clarkson’s diary, 1823-24: 10 September 1823. One abolitionist in Cheshire asked Clarkson whether the ‘present wretched state of the Planters’ was owing to their exertions.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 October 1823.

⁹⁷ *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, October 1823. The article ‘The West Indian Controversy’ was subsequently continued in later issues and widened its attack.

As if to prove the author's point, the third development of the session, the Demerara Revolt, was the most damaging and violent. On the 8th October 1823, Wilberforce wrote to Canning to request that the Colonial Secretary would not rely 'on the basis of Confidence in the Sincerity and hearty Co-operation of the Colonial Assemblies.'⁹⁸ The abolitionists already feared the intransigence of the West Indian legislatures. Canning's reply was ominous for the cause:

'My dear Wilberforce,

'Your letter could not have arrived more inopportunistically (as you will think); for at nearly the same moment arrived accounts of an insurrection of Negroes at Demerara which was very formidable in appearance & was not quelled when the accounts came away. The cry was for immediate and unqualified freedom.

'I am sure you do not doubt my sincerity as to the good of the blacks: but I confess I am not prepared to sacrifice all my white fellow Countrymen to that object.'⁹⁹

The Demerara revolt erupted in mid-August 1823. Beginning in Success and Resouvenir plantations (the former owned by James Cropper's fiercest opponent, John Gladstone), the rebellion spread over thirty seven estates and saw the rising of an estimated twelve to thirteen thousand slaves at its peak.¹⁰⁰ The rebel leaders quickly took over the plantations on the east coast and demanded talks with the Governor. The revolt was fuelled by rumours that the King had granted them their freedom, or at least three days in a week which would allow them to support themselves and to attend religious worship on Sunday mornings. As ever, the rebellion was curbed with brutal force. 250 slaves died over the course of the next few months: many were shot when they refused to disperse, others were hung or whipped to death during the bloody reprisals. The greatest savagery was reserved for the leaders of the revolt: Quamina Gladstone's body, grotesquely infested with insects, was displayed in chains in front of one plantation.¹⁰¹

The Demerara revolt had a great impact on the abolitionist cause, though not because of its scale or intensity. As Craton has observed, the rebellion of 1823 was far less surprising than 'Bussa's Rebellion' in Barbados some seven years earlier. Demerara was a new colony with an extremely brutalised system of cultivation which had

⁹⁸ MSS Harewood Collection, Leeds Archives. HAR/GC 80a: Correspondence between George Canning and William Wilberforce, 1800-1824. Letter from Wilberforce to Canning, dated Barmouth, 8 October 1823.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, letter from George Canning to William Wilberforce, dated 11 October 1823.

¹⁰⁰ W. L. Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition* (1926), p. 130; Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains* (1982), chapter 21; Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood - The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York, Oxford, 1994), chapter 5.

¹⁰¹ Michael Craton, *op.cit.*, chapter 21; James Walvin, *Black Ivory* (1992), p. 276.

attracted the investment of rapacious absentee planters such as John Gladstone. Barbados, by contrast, was the oldest and most settled of the British islands, a fact reflected by the balance between the sexes in the slave population by that time.¹⁰² Nor did the significance of the revolt lie in the inhuman punishments inflicted upon the slaves in the aftermath of the revolt, although they certainly captured the popular imagination. The key to the impact of the Demerara revolt lay in the persecution of Reverend John Smith. In 1817, Smith had been despatched to Demerara on behalf of the London Missionary Society. At Bethel Chapel, just outside Gladstone's Success plantation, he regularly preached to 800 slaves and gave religious instruction to 2,000 blacks.¹⁰³ Bethel Chapel was a key meeting place for east-coast slaves and some of the leaders of the Demerara revolt, including Quamina, were black Deacons at Smith's Chapel. As a consequence of this connection, Smith was arrested, tried and sentenced to death for complicity in the rebellion (though not its instigation) in October-November 1823. Although the sentence was commuted, the King's despatch to that effect arrived tragically late. Smith died of consumption in his cell on the 6th February 1824 while awaiting execution.¹⁰⁴

On hearing reports of the Demerara revolt, the London Committee urgently wrote to their correspondents in the West Indian outports of Liverpool, Glasgow and Bristol and to the Baptist Missionary Society for all available information.¹⁰⁵ It was soon understood that Canning laid the blame for the revolt squarely at the feet of the abolitionists.¹⁰⁶ The first reports of the Demerara revolt reached Britain in time for the November issues of the now organised West Indian press. Anti-abolitionist tracts quickly blamed the rebellious rhetoric of Missionary Smith and popular agitation at home for the insurrection.¹⁰⁷ Clarkson, still on tour and now facing increasing opposition locally, recommended that a refutation of the abolitionist's part in the Demerara insurrection should be added to his next work.¹⁰⁸ In December, he was recalled to London to help the abolitionists counter the charges set against them. Provincial abolitionists were clearly uncertain about the part they had played in the rebellion and the way forward. By the 16th, the London Society had received 'several letters... adverting to the late occurrences in Demerara and enquiring what Impression

¹⁰² Craton, *op cit.*, p. 267; Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom*, pp. 139-140; Walvin, *Black Ivory* (1992), pp. 275-276 and p. 267.

¹⁰³ Walvin., *Black Ivory*, pp. 275-276.

¹⁰⁴ Craton, *op.cit.*, chapter 21.

¹⁰⁵ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 24 October 1823.

¹⁰⁶ R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *Life of William Wilberforce*, 5 vols. (1838), vol. V, pp. 201-202. Letter from Macaulay to Wilberforce, 11 November 1823.

¹⁰⁷ The article 'The West India Controversy' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, October 1823, made these reservations slightly in advance of news of the rebellion.

¹⁰⁸ MSS Clarkson's diary, 1823-24: 10 November 1823, 16 November 1823.

the intelligence of that occurrence has made on the Committee as to the Preparation and Transmission of Petitions.' The Demerara revolt threatened to undermine all of Clarkson's endeavours in the field. Immediately, the Committee urged 'that the Friends of the cause should not in the least relax in promoting Petitions' and that, although they had no 'precise and authentic information' on the revolt, they would circulate it once it had been received.¹⁰⁹ The lack of accurate knowledge which hindered the abolitionist refutation of their part in the Demerara rebellion presented the daily press with no such quandaries. William Cobbett, always alert to opportunities to attack Wilberforce and the Methodists, printed a damning indictment of the abolitionists in his *Political Register*.¹¹⁰ On 27th December, the London Society ordered the sub-committee for the periodical press to answer the articles and pamphlets which were increasingly directed against them.¹¹¹

The circumstances for the abolitionists looked unfavourable, but doubts over the expediency of renewing petitions dissipated over the winter months for three reasons. Firstly, news of West Indian resistance to even the limited measures proposed by the government reached Britain towards the end of the year. In late December, the Jamaican Assembly responded to Lord Bathurst's second dispatch with cries of defiance and even calls for independence. Berbice refrained from restricting harsh punishments as ordered for fear of a repetition of events in Demerara.¹¹² As a result, the London Committee urged local sympathisers to raise petitions to Parliament to express their concern that the regulations of 1823 would be circumvented by West Indian stubbornness.¹¹³ Secondly, the plight of Missionary Smith, even before his death, resulted in profound cries of indignation from the provinces. On the formation of the Hull and East Riding Anti-Slavery Association in November 1823, Daniel Sykes attacked the claims laid against the missionaries by West Indians.¹¹⁴ An anonymous writer in the *Hull Advertiser* one week later argued that it was the failure of the colonial legislatures to grant amelioration which had resulted in the rebellion, not the activities of the abolitionists or the missionaries.¹¹⁵ Following his death, Smith became a martyr and an important symbol for the anti-slavery cause. And thirdly, when Parliament met on the 3rd February 1824, the King's speech did not include further measures for amelioration. At once the abolitionists' worst fears were

¹⁰⁹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 16 December 1823.

¹¹⁰ Mathieson, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

¹¹¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 27 December 1823.

¹¹² Mathieson, *op.cit.*, p. 135.

¹¹³ Anti-Slavery Society circular, begins: 'As the time approaches for the meeting of Parliament...' (24 January 1824).

¹¹⁴ *Hull Advertiser*, 7 November 1823.

¹¹⁵ *Hull Advertiser*, 14 November 1823: Letter from 'HOMO SUM.'

confirmed. Yet these three factors, set-backs in their own ways, allowed abolitionists once more to insist upon the necessity of raising petitions.

Petitions were presented to the House of Commons from February 1824 and continued to be received until June. In total 527 petitions were received; 651 places petitioned. A comparison with the results for 1823 indicates the areas of principal change. Almost two and a half times more petitions were received in 1824 than in the preceding year. Both the number of places petitioning and the number of inhabitants petitions received by the Commons increased at a greater rate than this. The figures also indicate a small extension of the franchise. In 1823, 68% of petitions came from the inhabitants alone with a further 22% from privileged groups and the general inhabitants combined. In 1824, the first figure rose to 88% but the latter fell to 7%. The number of petitions received from privileged groups and inhabitants together fell from 48 to 34 at the same time that the overall number of petitions received had more than doubled. If we look at those places which sent petitions of this kind in 1823 and petitioned again the following year, the majority no longer mentioned the privileged sections of society as specific petitioners, and instead transferred to the wider general inhabitants franchise. Those new places which petitioned in 1824 did so principally as inhabitants, perhaps reflecting Clarkson's calls for the largest number of signatures.

The results of Clarkson's tour and the London Society's methods becomes clear when we consider the results in terms of places petitioning and their continuity with the preceding campaign. By February 1824, their combined efforts had established over 150 new committees, many in places which had not petitioned. 138 out of 242 places which petitioned in 1823 did so again in 1824, meaning that just over half (57%) renewed their calls to Parliament. This 'persistence rate' appears small and may at first reflect abolitionist satisfaction with the resolutions of 1823 but it could equally represent the pressures facing abolitionists who sought to renew petitions, as outlined above. The other side of this equation is that 513 *new* places petitioned against slavery in 1824, four-fifths of the total. This was primarily the result of Clarkson's endeavours on his tour. Moreover, if we remember Clarkson's success in persuading abolitionist groups to undertake wide catchment areas, it is unsurprising that the number of towns and villages which joined with one or more places to raise anti-slavery petitions increased above the basic rate of two and a half times. The systematic method of mobilising support began paying dividends in 1824.

The petitions of 1824 were largely formed to give support to the government's plan but following the neglect of the issue in the King's speech the abolitionists became

concerned. On 14 February, members of the London Committee met with Canning and discovered that the Ministry intended only to press for amelioration in Trinidad through an order in council.¹¹⁶ William Allen was dismayed:

‘The present is a momentous crisis. My wish is that we should not concede too much, as I believe we have the country strongly with us, but at the same time, I am desirous that we should go hand in hand with ministers, if possible.’¹¹⁷

This dilemma was represented in the petitions from across the country. Clarkson’s appeals to the country on his tour produced one type of petition. The editor of the *Derby Mercury*, commenting on the local petition which had been ‘couched in very general terms,’ insisted that ‘such expressions of the voice of the country must be regarded as affording support to the Ministry in carrying in to effect the means to which they have pledged themselves.’¹¹⁸ The York petition was also raised to give the Ministry ‘the general supportive expressions of public opinion’: the petitioners raised over 1,200 signatures in less than a week.¹¹⁹ Other petitions supportive of the government incorporated proposals to ease the economic distress of the West Indians which had been well publicised. Several petitions offered compensation.¹²⁰ One or two early petitions undoubtedly fell foul of the immediate shock of the Demerara revolt. At Southampton, a petition calling for the enactment of the 1823 resolutions was rejected and an amendment carried declaring that ‘in the present state of the islands, the further discussion of this delicate question was unwise, dangerous and impolitic.’¹²¹ Even the moderate Derby petition was attacked in the local press.¹²² A writer in the *Hull Advertiser* responded to the clamour of popular criticism of the abolitionists:

‘But Demerara! the insurrection in Demerara! - the result as is pretended, of the very first attempts made in the British Parliament to meliorate a system which one might suppose sufficient of itself to goad any human being into resistance and insurrection.’¹²³

The second type of petitions raised was openly critical of the May resolutions and used them as a rallying cry. Daniel Sykes of Hull announced his regret at several

¹¹⁶ Mathieson, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

¹¹⁷ William Allen, *Life of William Allen*, 3 vols. (1846), vol. II, p. 377. Entry for 21 February 1824.

¹¹⁸ *Derby Mercury*, 28 January 1824.

¹¹⁹ *York Herald*, 6 March and 13 March 1824.

¹²⁰ *Doncaster, Nottingham and Lincoln Gazette*, 13 February 1824. The Doncaster petitioners stated that they would ‘cheerfully contribute to any expense that may reasonably be required.’

¹²¹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7 February 1824.

¹²² *Derby Mercury*, 28 January 1824.

¹²³ *Hull Advertiser*, 14 November 1824.

aspects of Canning's counter-resolutions and argued for the creation of Associations 'which would impress upon ministers the truth.'¹²⁴ In Kendal, William Dilworth Crewdson, the local Quaker abolitionist, moved for the adoption of a petition which expressed the resentment felt by many of his fellow inhabitants towards Canning's Resolutions. One attendee moved an amendment proposing that the meeting was satisfied that all efforts were being made by the government and that no meeting was necessary but it received only three votes and was lost.¹²⁵

The official announcement, on the 16th March 1824, of the government's intention to press for limited amelioration in Trinidad only, rallied many abolitionists to make new calls on the legislature to take direct action.¹²⁶ The Recorder of Chester expressed 'his regret at the partiality of the proposed plan, and was of opinion that ministers, being alarmed, were backing out of their pledge.'¹²⁷ The *York Herald* was cautiously critical when commenting on the plan:

'Such is the course which the Ministers of the Crown intend to adopt, and so far as it goes, we feel inclined to approve their moderation. But in our opinion, it is far short of that which was expected by the friends of a gradual but CERTAIN emancipation.'¹²⁸

It was at the same time, around the middle of March, that news of the Rev. Smith's death in his Demerara cell reached England and was reported in the press. The immediate result was that the London Missionary Society sent a petition to the Commons appealing for an enquiry into the proceedings of the trial of the Reverend John Smith. This initiated a flood of petitions over the period of one month which roughly coincided with the last month of anti-slavery petitioning. The House of Commons was inundated with 189 petitions on the Smith case from a total of 230 places. The vast majority of these petitions came from inhabitants and *not* religious bodies. An analysis of these returns suggests that only 42%, less than half of these places, also petitioned for the gradual abolition of slavery. Barely one eighth of places which petitioned against slavery in 1824 sent separate petitions against the trial of John Smith contemporaneously.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 November 1823.

¹²⁵ MSS Crewdson Papers, Kendal Archives. WD/Cu/160: Cuttings relating to Kendal and the abolition of slavery, 1814-1838. Report of meeting held on 24th February 1824 from unnamed local newspaper.

¹²⁶ *House of Commons Debates*, 16 March 1824. Bathurst presented the same response to the Lords on the same day.

¹²⁷ *Liverpool Mercury*, 2 April 1824.

¹²⁸ *York Herald*, 20 March 1824.

Nevertheless, the missionary case may have been a significant mobilising force in the raising of petitions late in the session. It is also possible that abolitionist petitions contained appeals relating to the Smith case as well as the state of slavery. As details of the fate of Rev. Smith became more clear, abolitionists were horrified by the treatment of fellow white and black Christians. The Hull and East Riding Anti-Slavery Association passed resolutions purely on the missionary question in July 1824. A correspondent in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* used the trial of John Smith to illustrate the debased concept of English liberties in the West Indies.¹²⁹ The Smith case fuelled the discussion of the right of the slave to religious instruction. The actions of the planters against Christian ministers were now represented as a systematic attempt to keep the slaves in bondage.¹³⁰ In York, the Rev. James Parsons 'entered most minutely into the causes of the late insurrection at Demerara which he clearly proved to have originated with the planters themselves, by the iron hand of oppression being ever raised against the negroes.'¹³¹ There can be no doubt that the examples of planter violence and opposition towards missionaries fuelled the anti-slavery cause at the grass-roots considerably in 1824 and it is likely that petitions averted to Smith's case.

By separating the petition campaigns of 1823 and 1824, we can now more fully appreciate the work of Clarkson and Cropper, the importance of the Demerara insurrection and the discontinuities within the abolitionist movement. The petition campaign of 1823 reflected new concerns, drew on a new economic ideology of anti-slavery and was less widespread than has previously been supposed. Even by the end of 1824, the abolitionists had failed to reclaim the ubiquity of feeling expressed in 1814. Moreover, the next five years saw few attempts to capitalise on this agitation. Although petitions on the slavery issue were sent to Parliament annually in the period 1825-1829, they were not numerous nor are they considered significant by historians. In the next two chapters we will look at how the forces which shaped the campaigns of 1823 and 1824 led to a reorientation of abolitionist thought and aims in the second half of the 1820s. It was as a result of these ideological battles that anti-slavery was re-invented and revived in the most popular form in its history. These changes, which have evaded the attention of most historians, were forged at the local level.

¹²⁹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 31 January 1824.

¹³⁰ *Hull Advertiser*, 9 July 1824.

¹³¹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 12 March 1824. The report was taken from an undated report in the *Leeds Mercury*.

Chapter Eight

ABOLITIONIST THOUGHT AND THE SUGAR QUESTION, 1824-1829.

From the first annual meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society in June 1824 to the beginning of the 1830 petition campaign, the story of the London Committee is relatively static. However, as we have seen, this period saw the rapid development and consolidation of abolitionist activity at the grass-roots level. In the second half of the 1820s, provincial abolitionists took a greater role in defining abolitionist activity by adopting new and sometimes competing strategies for the ultimate emancipation of the slaves. Anti-slavery thinkers in London frequently found themselves lagging behind the advanced state of public opinion in the country and were consequently required to change their outlook or reconsider their position. There were three significant changes in total. Firstly, the failure of the government to adopt efficient measures to improve the conditions of West Indian slaves forced local abolitionists to adopt two economic campaigns for slave emancipation, the abstention from slave-grown produce and the equalisation of the sugar duties. Secondly, increasing frustration and antagonism towards the government, and also the national and Parliamentary leadership of the anti-slavery campaign, led increasingly to calls for the abandonment of gradualist measures and the advocacy of immediate abolition. Thirdly, the interaction between abolitionists and the defenders of slavery and the defenders of the working population in Britain forced abolitionists to consider their campaign in the light of domestic 'distress.' These ideological considerations revolved around the question of the sugar trade and its importance to the individual, to the nation, and globally. In this chapter, we will explore the anti-slavery thought of provincial abolitionists with reference to the sugar question and these three ideological developments.

EQUALISATION VS. ABSTENTION

Abolitionist discontent with the shortcomings of Canning's resolutions bore two types of economic assault. The first was a concerted campaign for the equalisation of the sugar duties; the second was a revival of the old campaign of abstention from slave-grown sugar. Both of these campaigns were pressed on the London Anti-Slavery Society by provincial abolitionists who increasingly advocated these views in their

own pamphlets, newspapers and at public meetings. Both campaigns also put the question of the sugar trade at the centre of abolitionist thought and agitation. In this section, we will examine the relationship between these two campaigns.

David Brion Davis suggested that the abolitionist leadership was reluctant to accept the equalisation of the sugar duties as an integral part of the campaign for slave emancipation.¹ This was certainly true in the Anti-Slavery Society's first year of operations. While on his tour, Clarkson, having observed the confusion of provincial abolitionists, noted in his diary 'Sugar Question never more to be mixed with ours - must be kept distant from all political and commercial bearings.'² His communication to London to this effect did not favourably prepare the London Committee for Cropper's new work, an essay on the impolicy of slavery which he sent to the Anti-Slavery Society for publication at the end of October 1823.³ In fact, the *Essay on the Impolicy of Slavery* does not appear to have been printed by the London Society until May 1825.⁴ Cropper expressed his dissatisfaction in a private letter to the London Committee.⁵ A few months later, in his *Letter Addressed to the Liverpool Society*, he argued that any attempts to mitigate slavery would fail while it was protected by preferential duties and bounties. He also implied that the abolitionist leadership was negligent in failing to relate their campaign to the precise economic context of slavery and international trade. As Davis has suggested, it is likely that many London abolitionists 'regarded Cropper, whose motives were difficult to defend, as a liability to the cause,'⁶ hence Clarkson's concern over adopting the 'commercial bearings' of the question. Unsurprisingly, the London Society did not accept Cropper's *Letter* for publication.⁷

¹ David Brion Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1823-1833,' *Journal of Negro History* (1960), p. 154.

² MSS Thomas Clarkson, 'Diary of a Tour for the Anti-Slavery Society, 1823-1824,' National Library of Wales, MS 17984 A (hereafter cited as MSS 'Clarkson's diary'): 10 October 1823.

³ The article was a copy of an anonymous letter which he had submitted to the *Liverpool Mercury* earlier that month. [James Cropper], *Essay on the Impolicy of Slavery* (1824), cf. *Liverpool Mercury*, 31 October 1823; K. Charlton, 'James Cropper and Liverpool's Contribution to the Anti-Slavery Movement,' *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, CXIII (1971), p. 63.

⁴ MSS 'Minute books of Committee on Slavery,' Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Brit. Emp S20 E2/1-5, 5 vols. (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society'), E2/2: 11 May 1825. Cropper and Macaulay were asked to revise the 'Impolicy sheet.'

⁵ John Gladstone and James Cropper, *The Correspondence between John Gladstone Esq. MP and James Cropper Esq. on the Present State of Slavery in the British West Indies* (Liverpool, 1824). Cropper prints part of this letter on pp. 54-55.

⁶ Davis, 'James Cropper... 1821-23,' p. 254.

⁷ James Cropper, *A Letter addressed to the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of the Slavery* (Liverpool, 1823); Davis, 'James Cropper, 1821-23,' p. 254; MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 24 February 1824.

Nevertheless, the London group's caution quickly dissipated. Early in 1824, they distributed two tracts which reinforced Cropper's case. In February, they ordered 5,000 copies of *An Address to the People of Illinois on the Impolicy of Slavery*, a pamphlet which included a wide-ranging discussion of the superior benefits of free labour and suggested that slave cultivation had a disastrous effect on soil fertility, as Cropper and Hodgson had claimed.⁸ The London Committee also printed 3,000 copies of an address to the public by the Leicester Anti-Slavery Society in which it was stated that the superiority of free labour could be 'safely classed with the most established maxims of political economy.'⁹ Although Cropper's *Impolicy* was not immediately accepted, the London Committee had evidently moved towards the adoption of Cropper's ideas by the summer of 1824, six months before the leadership acquiesced according to Davis.¹⁰ Indeed, at the first annual meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society in June, many of Cropper's ideas were advocated. The committee recognised the harmful effect of the sugar monopoly on the prospect of abolition, and hoped for the success of the sugar duties question in Parliament. They noted that 'the capital requested to cultivate sugar in the East Indies is very small, as compared with that necessary in the West; and that a most advantageous return may be expected from capital so employed.'¹¹ Thus, the committee's first report, printed at the end of the 1824 petition campaign, suggested to provincial abolitionists that the duties question was an important prop of anti-slavery ideology. Clearly the abolitionist leadership absorbed Cropper's arguments earlier than Davis has calculated.

The reason for this adjustment within anti-slavery thought relates once more to the short-comings of Canning's counter-resolutions. By February 1824, abolitionists in London and the country already doubted that the colonial legislatures would enact the government's recommended improvements. A correspondent in *The Cambrian* argued that the planters would continue to oppose measures so long as they felt they would

⁸ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 17 February 1824. The slave-holders of Virginia had recently called on the people of Illinois to repeal the exclusion of slavery from their state laws so that slave-holders could cultivate their richer lands. *The Injurious Effects of Slave Labour: An Impartial Appeal to the reason, justice, and patriotism of the people of Illinois on the injurious effects of slave labour* (Philadelphia, re-printed by the London Committee, 1824). For Cropper's statements on soil fertility, see Gladstone and Cropper *Correspondence*, p. 7 and p. 11.

⁹ Leicester Auxiliary Anti-Slavery Society, *An Address to the Public on the State of Slavery in the West India Islands* (Leicester, 1824); MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 2 March 1824.

¹⁰ Davis implies that the leadership capitulated in early 1825. Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Society, 1824-33,' *Journal of Negro History* (1960), p. 160. David Turley also concludes from Davis that the leadership 'acquiesced' in 1825. David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991), p. 38.

¹¹ Anti-Slavery Society, *Report of the Committee of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, read at the annual meeting on the 25th June 1824* (1824).

lose out.¹² Cropper followed up this point by stressing once again the advantages of free labour: 'If the Planters believed, as I do, that the emancipation of their Slaves would be a benefit to themselves, then they would adopt it; but, so long as they think it would be a loss, can we suppose them likely to be the sincere advocates of an improvement which is to fit the Slaves for emancipation?'¹³ Cropper thus presented the equalisation argument as a way of winning over the West Indians and ensuring the adoption of the government's resolutions. This was an interpretation which appealed to the conservative, to those who were unprepared to condemn government inactivity or failure in the West Indies.¹⁴ It was also an interpretation which the London Society favoured, especially from mid-February 1824 when they received news that the Government intended to do nothing, except in Trinidad where there was no colonial assembly.¹⁵ In the days that followed, the two pamphlets discussed above were accepted by the London Society, representing a major step towards the adoption of the equalisation campaign. The London abolitionists, having made a pact with the Ministry not to mobilise on the question by October 1824, looked increasingly to other measures.¹⁶

But the equalisation argument had another interpretation. As a trade measure, it could be imposed on the colonies by the British government without recourse to the West Indian planters. In this way, equalisation could bypass West Indian obstinacy and secure gradual emancipation without the need to win over the planters.¹⁷ In fact, many provincial abolitionists had adopted equalisation in *anticipation* of colonial resistance as early as the first revived petition campaign of 1823. Cropper's argument had an appeal as a means of escaping the reliance on the West Indian planters and the abolitionists' Parliamentary leadership who came under increasing criticism from local supporters.¹⁸ The London Society decided to mobilise on this duties question in response to the interest expressed in it by provincial abolitionists. In June, Thomas Clarkson embarked upon a second tour of the country during which he persuaded

¹² Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence* (1824). The *Cambrian* article is referred to by Cropper on p. 30.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ In Cardigan, the Mayor consented to 'a Petition against Drawbacks & Bounties, if necessary, but to no other, or at least, to no petition, which should imply that Government had not done their duty to the utmost.' MSS Clarkson's diary: 20 July 1824.

¹⁵ W. L. Mathieson, *British Slavery and Its Abolition* (1926), p. 138.

¹⁶ MSS Clarkson diary: 2 October 1824: '... we cannot make any public movement for some time, out of Delicacy to Ministers...'

¹⁷ This argument was reiterated in J. J. Gurney, *Substance of a speech delivered by John Joseph Gurney, Esq., at a public meeting of the inhabitants of Norwich on the 28th January 1824 on the subject of British Colonial Slavery* (Norwich, 1824).

¹⁸ Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* (Leicester, 1824), discussed later, is an example of this discontent.

local abolitionists to mobilise around the drawbacks and bounties issue. In Cardigan, Carlisle, and across the Lake District he briefed auxiliary committees on the necessity of petitioning for equalisation. Most of the committees he contacted, especially those which had been in existence since his first tour and had received anti-slavery tracts, were willing to assist.¹⁹ Although the Anti-Slavery Society tried to mobilise support around this issue, 'provincial reformers generally took the ideological initiative away from London on this important point,' as David Turley has suggested.²⁰

Cropper also did a great deal to publicise his equalisation campaign at this time. His letter on the impolicy of slavery sparked a series of bitter exchanges with three West Indian apologists, T. F., 'Mercator' and 'Vindex,' in the Liverpool newspapers over the autumn and winter months of 1823-24. 'Mercator' was later revealed to be John Gladstone, the father of William Ewart Gladstone and Liverpool's most prominent West Indian. Gladstone was not only chairman of the Liverpool West India association, and a personal friend of both Canning and Huskisson, but he owned Success, the plantation in Demerara which saw the first stirrings of the rebellion in 1823. Gladstone impugned Cropper's motives and reasoning, arguing that Liverpool's principal East Indian was using humanitarianism to cloak economic guile. Cropper's past as an importer of slave-grown cotton was also dredged up. Gladstone even had the gall to defend slave conditions in Demerara and to blame the revolt on Cropper and the abolitionists. Most importantly, he directly challenged Cropper's picture of a profitable East Indian sugar trade and forced him to justify his claim that slave labour was inherently inefficient. Though Cropper's reasoning benefited greatly from these discussions, the argument was hopelessly lost to the West Indian. Cropper could not compete with Gladstone's ready wit and biting contempt for the abolitionists. Cropper's use of an anonymous sources was ridiculed by Gladstone in characteristic fashion: 'for aught we know, he may be the man in the moon, of whom children hear so frequently.'²¹ Moreover, two members of the Liverpool Society withdrew from the committee and attacked Cropper in the press. Joseph Sandars condemned the economic critique and insisted that black Africans were incapable of working as free labourers: Hodgson and Cropper had 'served to mislead, in no ordinary degree, a large portion of the public in their deliberations on West India Slavery.'²² Sandars was also scared away by the news from Demerara: 'your measures will accelerate the crisis, and then, for Emancipation, you will have to read Revolt.'²³ Another member of the

¹⁹ MSS Clarkson diary: 20 July 1824, 7-16 September 1824.

²⁰ Turley, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

²¹ Gladstone and Cropper, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

²² *Ibid.*, p. vii.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

Liverpool Society, John Ashton Yates, stated that the abolitionists had been prone to exaggeration and that slave conditions had materially improved since 1807.²⁴ At the local level, Cropper came off worst: the letters of Cropper and his critics were collected and printed by the Liverpool West India Association in 1824. But the debate fortified Cropper's arguments at the national level. One of the most important results was the creation of a 'Chart of the World on Mercator's plan' indicating areas of free sugar cultivation, which Cropper presented to the London Committee and which was subsequently reprinted.²⁵

Cropper also made efforts to organise support for abolition and equalisation by linking it to a third problem, Irish poverty. Between October and December 1824, Cropper toured Ireland with his daughter Eliza, who later married the Birmingham Quaker abolitionist, Joseph Sturge.²⁶ As chairman of the Liverpool Auxiliary Hibernian Society, he had a concern for the moral welfare and religious education of the Irish population.²⁷ Like many other contemporary observers, Cropper was horrified by the state of the Irish population in the wake of the 1822 potato famine which plunged almost one million people into a state of destitution.²⁸ He was especially concerned that in the future 'any failure of that potato crop will sink them into a state of misery; from which they have no power whatever to extricate themselves.'²⁹ In this, he was one of a number of Quaker abolitionists who increasingly expressed an interest in the poverty and distress of Irish labourers. The issue had been brought before an African Institution fund for extending the reading of the scriptures throughout Africa. The institution's principal agent, the Quaker Hannah Kilham, left for Gambia in 1824 but before that, 'the destitute condition of the female peasantry of some parts of Ireland having excited much interest and sympathy in her mind, she resolved to dedicate some time to their cause.' Kilham stayed in Ireland for several months, and worked with the officers of the British and Irish Ladies' Society for improving the industry and welfare of the Female Peasantry in Ireland. Provincial abolitionists featured heavily in the subscription list of the fund for 1824: the largest donation, of £110.15.6 (almost half the total for donations received in that year), came from a group of Yorkshire

²⁴ Charlton, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

²⁵ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 8 June 1825.

²⁶ K. Charlton, 'The State of Ireland in the 1820s: James Cropper's Plan,' *Irish Historical Studies*, xvii, no. 67 (1971).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (London, New York, 1989), p. 40.

²⁹ Letter dated 10 December 1824 in Anne Cropper (ed.) *Extracts from letters of James Cropper, for his grand-children* (1850).

Quakers, headed by the York abolitionist Samuel Tuke.³⁰ Three years later, the Quaker abolitionists Elizabeth Fry and J. J. Gurney visited Ireland and published a report of their observations.³¹

Nevertheless, Cropper was the first abolitionist to draw the Irish problem and the abolitionist mission together, cementing the two with an appeal for the removal of protectionist trade duties imposed on East Indian produce. In his 'Impolicy of Slavery' article of October 1823, he had drawn a series of clear connections between West Indian slavery, the equalisation of the sugar duties and the distress of the Irish population. Following the reduction of restrictions on the Indian cotton trade in 1822-23, he had 'seen with delight some branches of this trade extending to Ireland, and presenting the best means of improving and raising her depressed population.' For Cropper, 'the Slavery in the West Indies, and the condition of a large part of the population in Ireland, form two dark stains on the otherwise bright and cheering picture.' In fact, the same protection on West Indian trade 'also served to bind down the energies and prevent the prosperity of Ireland.'³² Cropper argued that a removal of duties on East Indian trade would allow cheap raw cotton from the East to be processed in Irish cotton factories and then sold back to the vast market of India in the form of finished goods.³³ He therefore pressed local chambers of commerce and the landed classes to build textile mills and to press for equalisation.³⁴ Not only would equalisation provide employment for the vast population of Ireland, it would simultaneously put pressure on the plantation economies of the West Indies to emancipate their slaves, and demonstrate the superiority of free labour to the slave-cotton Planters of North America. In short, Cropper's saw *laissez-faire* equalisation as nothing short of a panacea.

Cropper's plans for Ireland did not take root. Competition with the depressed wages of Lancashire forced Cropper to give up his part share in a cotton factory at Limerick with loss.³⁵ The only concrete result was the construction of a textile mill and model

³⁰ African Institution, *Second report of a Committee managing a fund raised for the purpose of promoting African instruction* (1824).

³¹ E. Fry and J. J. Gurney, *Report addressed to the marquess of Wellesley, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, reporting their late visit to that country* (London, 1827) quoted on K. Charlton, 'The State of Ireland,' pp. 337-338. Fry and Gurney evidently disagreed with Cropper's ideas and suggested that 'the modern manufacturing system... [was] too often productive of extensive immorality as well as of almost intolerable occasional distress.'

³² *Liverpool Mercury*, 31 October 1823.

³³ James Cropper, *Present State of Ireland with a Plan for improving the position of the People* (Liverpool, 1825), *passim*.

³⁴ Details of Cropper's tour are given in Charlton, *op. cit.*, pp. 327-331.

³⁵ Letter from James Cropper to Joseph Sturge, 14 July 1827, in Anne Cropper, *Letters of James Cropper*, p. 119. The Limerick factory had to use American slave-grown cotton to compete, a fact

village at Portlaw by David Malcolmson, a Quaker entrepreneur from Clonmel: by the 1840s, 1,800 people were employed in the factory which grew to perform the tasks of manufacturing, finishing and dyeing.³⁶ However, Cropper's tour was of greater significance for the anti-slavery cause in Ireland. Although local supporters often objected to the confusion of the Irish problem with those of the sugar duties, the East India trade and abolition,³⁷ Cropper was able to foster closer links with abolitionists while on his tour. Cropper stayed with Irish Quakers who had been alerted to the cause at the Irish Yearly Meeting earlier in 1824 when they had petitioned Parliament for abolition.³⁸ His record of Irish correspondents shows a strong connection with Quaker supporters: Moyallan, a traditional Quaker centre, received numerous anti-slavery tracts and items from Liverpool between 1827 and 1829.³⁹ Overall, Cropper visited ten of the sixteen anti-slavery centres. He was also in contact with influential Irish figures: the author Maria Edgeworth became an important correspondent who received tracts from Liverpool and later a work-bag from the Female Society for Birmingham.⁴⁰ It has also been suggested that O'Connell 'was stimulated to a closer activity on behalf of anti-slavery' as a result of hearing Cropper's plan.⁴¹ Though not officially sanctioned by the London Committee, Cropper kept the leadership informed of 'the success of his operations... in the cause.'⁴²

At the same time as the equalisation campaign was being absorbed into the mainstream of anti-slavery propaganda, provincial abolitionists pressurised the London committee to revive abstention. This was the work of Elizabeth Heyrick, a Leicestershire Quaker, who advocated immediate emancipation through a slave-sugar boycott in her radical pamphlet *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* (1824). As Clare Midgley has observed, the national abstention campaign of 1824-25 was 'initiated in response to disillusionment with the effectiveness of attempting to influence Parliament by petitioning.'⁴³ Heyrick objected to the political calculation of the

which caused Cropper a great deal of discomfort and influenced his attitudes to the slave-produce boycott.

³⁶ Charlton, *op.cit.*, p. 337.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

³⁸ Richard S. Harrison, 'Irish Quaker perspectives on the anti-slavery movement,' in *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (1991), pp. 108-109.

³⁹ MSS Cropper Papers, Merseyside Maritime Museum Archives, Albert Dock, Liverpool. For example Abell and Bewley in Cork, and the Malcolmson's in Clonmel. MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/13, Nos. 43 and 49.

⁴⁰ MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/13 - 38, 'Irish correspondents'; Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, notes on the author (Everyman edition, 1993); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery - The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (1992), p. 57.

⁴¹ Harrison, *op.cit.*, p. 109.

⁴² MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 10 February 1824, 8 December 1824.

⁴³ Clare Midgley, 'Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture,' *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1996), p. 153.

abolitionist leadership and their reliance on Parliamentary measures and lobbying. By transferring the business of emancipation from Divine to human will, 'disappointment and defeat' had been the inevitable consequence. Her call for 'something more decisive, more efficient than words' led naturally to her advocacy of abstention, a campaign which stressed ideas of personal complicity in the institution of slavery and by-passed the need for direct government action.⁴⁴ The pamphlet ran to three editions and was widely distributed especially by ladies societies from 1825 along with Heyrick's later works. A few months after its release, Clarkson noted 'every where People are asking me about *immediate abstention*, and whether that would not be the best; and whether they should not leave off West India sugar & use the East only. There is certainly a Disposition to make a Sacrifice for the Cause.'⁴⁵

The minute books of the London Society record a flurry of activity on all aspects of the sugar question during this six-month period but the impetus towards this activity is unclear. Both the equalisation and abstention campaigns received popular backing, and news of this support was fed back to the London Committee through Clarkson's letters. But it is difficult to attribute weight to the role played by either force in the movement towards the promotion of free sugar by the London Committee. However, the evidence, though by no means clear, suggests that the equalisation campaign has been undervalued in this respect. This reading of anti-slavery ideology clarifies several issues relating to the pattern of popular abolitionism in the second half of the 1820s.

Although a campaign for the substitution of sugars would be of benefit to the equalisation campaign, and vice versa, the two were not entirely harmonious. In a letter to the *Liverpool Mercury* in 1823, Cropper argued that 'if the giving to Slaves their freedom, before they were fit for it, would do them an injury, (and I have always considered that it would,) then the rejection of the produce of their labour would have the same effect.'⁴⁶ In fact, Cropper was typically more hostile to abstention:

'... slave produce has now so interwoven itself with the wants and employments of the people of this country, and with those of the Slaves themselves, that this state must be tolerated until these poor beings are fitted for their freedom; but no expedience can justify their being held in Slavery one hour beyond it... The immediate disuse of slave produce would put out of employment hundreds of thousands of people in this country, and would, more or less, put to inconvenience almost every member of the community; whilst to the Slaves it would be far more injurious than the most unprepared and immediate emancipation.'⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* (Leicester, 1824).

⁴⁵ MSS Clarkson's diary: 2 October 1824.

⁴⁶ Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence* (Liverpool, 1824), p. 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Cropper viewed abstention as a final and desperate tactic.⁴⁸ This was the view subsequently adopted by the London Committee. The first report of the Society (June 1824) similarly stated that, *should the sugar duties question fail in Parliament*, 'it will still be in the power of every individual to give their effect, by renouncing the use of sugar grown by Slaves, and preferring to it the produce of free labour.'⁴⁹ Abstention, which had only been raised a few weeks earlier, was put in the context of Cropper's economic critique.

The fact that substitution, rather than total abstention, was made explicit in the first report is a reflection of the Society's increasing cognisance of commercial considerations. The West India lobby had tried to sabotage the equalisation argument by claiming that East Indian sugar was both expensive and of inferior quality. In the latter half of 1824, the London Society launched investigations to counter these pro-slavery accusations and perhaps to prove the greater efficiency of free labour. In August, the Society appointed a sub-committee 'for considering the best mode of bringing East India Sugar into general use.' Although the sub-committee did not include Cropper, it included two of his closest Quaker associates, Joseph Sturge and William Allen, and his fellow East Indian trader, Zachary Macaulay. Within two weeks, Sturge reported that a depot for the sale of East India sugar 'such as produced by free labour' had been opened at 17 Great Eastcheap under the management of James Heywood.⁵⁰ Heywood was quickly employed to test at random a large sample of East Indian sugar to calculate its capacity for refinement and its yield of processed goods as compared with that for West Indian sugar to counter John Gladstone's accusations. Soon after, the London Society directed several committee members to consider the formation of a free sugar company.⁵¹ This 'provisional committee,' which included Cropper, issued a statement in March 1825 which outlined the Company's intended aim of extending free cultivation of sugar, then cotton, in India. The Tropical Free Labour Company had a starting balance of £4 millions.⁵²

⁴⁸ In the *Liverpool Mercury* he had stated that 'if more direct means fail, the disuse of the produce of their labour will be well deserving of consideration.' Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence* (Liverpool, 1824), p. 27.

⁴⁹ Anti-Slavery Society, *Report of the Committee of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, read at the annual meeting on the 25th June 1824* (1824).

⁵⁰ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 24 and 31 August, 8 and 29 September 1824.

⁵¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 20 October and 8 December 1824.

⁵² Anon., 'Statement of the Tropical Free Labour Company' (1825). A hostile response to the statement was printed in the *New Times*, 28 March 1825.

By contrast, there is little evidence to suggest that abstention was the principal force behind this activity by London on the sugar question. Clarkson does not record a single moment during his second tour when he advocated abstention to local abolitionists, although he actively encouraged petitions for the equalisation of the sugar duties.⁵³ His first recorded contact with the abstention issue came at Carlisle in September 1824 where the local committee was hostile to the boycott.⁵⁴ Similarly, the books of the prolific abolitionist pamphleteer T. S. Winn and the address of the Leicester committee the London Society encouraged gradualism and neglected abstention.⁵⁵ It is, however, possible that the first report's concession to the sugar boycott came in direct response to Heyrick's pamphlet. Three weeks after the London Committee purchased twelve copies of *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition*, they printed their statement on the slave-sugar boycott in the first report mentioned above.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the fact that abstention was considered secondary to the duties question in the first report suggests the prevailing influence of Cropper's views. Indeed, the London Committee printed Cropper's *The Support of Slavery Investigated* at this time, in which he argued for the slow removal of the protective duties and their replacement with a system of bounties paid to those planters who adopted the government's plans for amelioration in proportion to the number of their slaves.⁵⁷ Therefore, the official publications of the London Committee reflect the public adoption of equalisation rather than an acceptance of abstention.

Nevertheless, abstention was rapidly adopted and news of its popularity was fed back to London via Clarkson and the letters of interested abolitionists in the country. As a result, James Stephen claimed in December 1824 that abstention 'appeared... to have become the true policy' of the Anti-Slavery Society and urged the London Committee to issue a declaration to promote the measure.⁵⁸ Provincial sympathisers were forcing the London Society into taking a clearer line on the sugar boycott argument. As the minutes of the Society for 22 December 1824 read:

'That as many members and friends of this Society in various parts of the kingdom have from conscientious feelings renounced the use of Sugar raised by the forced labour of Slaves & of theirs who are disposed to follow their example have expressed dissatisfaction at the silence of the Society on the subject, it has become expedient and necessary that the views of this Committee thereon, should be explicitly declared & the measures which

⁵³ MSS Clarkson's diary: part 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 16 September 1824.

⁵⁵ T. S. Winn, *Emancipation, or practical advice to the British slave-holders: with suggestions for the general improvement of West Indian affairs* (1824).

⁵⁶ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 8 June 1824.

⁵⁷ James Cropper, *The Support of Slavery Investigated* (1824).

⁵⁸ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 15 December 1824.

seem to them advisable recommended without further delay to the Society at large.'

The London Committee issued a statement clarifying its policy on 9th February 1825. The Society had no intention to mobilise a nationwide abstention campaign: 'In as far as abstinence from Slave-grown Sugar may be regarded as a matter of conscience, they feel that they have no right to interfere, but must leave the question to be decided by each individual for himself according to the dictates of his own conscience.' Moreover, it drew heavily on Cropper's work, remarking that 'whatever tends to raise the price of Slave-grown produce tends, in the same degree, to rivet the chains and to add to the labour and misery of the Slave.' Although the Committee conceded that it could 'contemplate no measure for attaining their ultimate object more certain' than widespread abstention, it thought that the removal of the protective duties was preferable.⁵⁹ In February 1825, just as the Government was considering a reform of the tariff system, the London Society sensibly bowed to popular pressure but maintained its allegiance to gradualism and equalisation.

This alignment of official anti-slavery ideology in favour of equalisation was not a mere passing phase. In February 1825, the London Committee asked their supporters in Parliament to find out the intentions of ministers regarding the newly-proposed West India company and any measures which could be raised against the protective duties.⁶⁰ Although the government was considering a general tariff review at the time, the Committee was surprised to find that Canning 'appeared to be new to the subject' of the sugar duties.⁶¹ The Anti-Slavery Society thus resolved to call a public meeting to discuss the question should the Government prove hesitant.⁶² At the meeting of April 1825, the London Society's second report enshrined Cropper's arguments in their fullest detail.⁶³ The objects of the Society for the year were to press for the acceptance of the May 1823 pledge, to obtain 'the abolition of those fiscal regulations which protect the produce of slave labour against the competition of Free Labour,' and to aid every scheme which brings free into competition with slave labour. As David Brion Davis has stated 'by the spring of 1825, James Cropper had become the unofficial philosopher of the anti-slavery movement.'⁶⁴ But the policies into which the abolitionist leadership had been reluctantly channelled by popular pressure expressed

⁵⁹ Anti-Slavery Society circular, begins: 'At a meeting of the Committee... 9th February 1825...'

⁶⁰ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 9 February 1825.

⁶¹ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1823-33,' p. 160; MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 9 March 1825.

⁶² MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 16 February 1825.

⁶³ Anti-Slavery Society, *Second Report of the Committee of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, read at the annual meeting on the 30th April 1825* (1825); *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, 1, June 1825.

⁶⁴ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1823-33,' p. 161.

dangerous immediatist ideas with which Cropper, and others, were unhappy. Just as James Cropper had become the movement's prime-thinker, pressure from the country had pushed the abolitionist leadership to adopt a position diametrically opposed to Cropper's own views.

GRADUALISM VS. IMMEDIATISM

The adoption of abstention, no matter how hesitantly in London, was only the first stage. Between 1824 and 1830, abolitionists nationwide moved towards the adoption of immediatism emancipation, a recognition that gradual measures for mitigating the condition of the slave were no substitute for instantaneous freedom. This transition has traditionally been seen in the light of two important events, the publication of Heyrick's *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* in 1824 and the impassioned speech made by Rev. Andrew Thomson at Edinburgh in 1830, in which he denounced gradualism and split the public meeting. Though landmark events in themselves, a gulf of six years exists between these developments which has not been charted by historians. Immediatism had become commonplace among provincial abolitionists by the end of the 1820s. In this section, we will look at the passage of this change at the grass-roots level.

Although Heyrick saw abstention and immediatism as the sides of a coin, the two were not necessarily treated as synonymous. The London Society's adoption of the sugar-boycott in the second half of 1824 is the clearest example of this case. Also at the local level, abolitionists could support abstention but oppose immediatism.⁶⁵ Ladies' societies approved of abstention two years before one of them, the Sheffield Ladies' Society, became the first anti-slavery association to advocate immediate abolition. Even after the precedent had been established, the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society advocated abstention but made no mention of immediatism on its formation in 1828.⁶⁶ Immediatism was not adopted as readily as the boycott. This should not surprise us as abolitionism was in an important transitional phase in 1824. At the same time as *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* was first circulated, some abolitionists expressed their opposition to the raising of petitions and the continuation

⁶⁵ See speech of Thomas Scales against immediatism though himself an outspoken advocate of abstention. *Leeds Mercury*, 10 May 1828.

⁶⁶ Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, *Rules and Resolutions of the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, with lists of the district treasurers, committee and secretaries, and of the subscribers* (Dublin, 1828).

of pressure on the government, especially in the wake of Canning's counter-resolutions and the slave rebellion in Demerara. The Darlington Anti-Slavery Society's refusal to support Canning's resolutions led Rev. Henry Phillpotts to refuse to distribute their tracts.⁶⁷ Some sympathetic parties were unwilling to accept descriptions of slavery from either the West Indians or the abolitionists, especially following Canning's condemnation of the anti-slavery lobby as 'wild theorists and rash speculators' in the spring of 1824.⁶⁸ Even some of those abolitionists who renewed their petitions expressed reservations about future activity. 'A very temperate petition' raised at the Beverley meeting of December 1825 called on the government to ensure that the 1823 resolutions were adopted in the colonies, yet it was only reluctantly supported by one of the principal inhabitants.⁶⁹ The Hull petition went only a little further in making the adoption of measures to carry the 1823 resolutions into effect an explicit demand.⁷⁰ From the perspective of the immediatist 1830s, these and other minor changes in the language of petitions appear inconsequential. But they represent the slow erosion of the gradualist mentality in the mid-1820s which had to take place before immediatism was adopted.

What was the gradualist mentality? Davis categorised gradualism as 'a reliance on indirect and slow-working means to achieve a desired social object' and judged it to be a corollary of attitudes to rights, law, property and progress.⁷¹ His description of the gradualist mind as one which 'tended to think of history in terms of linear time and logical categories, and that emphasised the importance of self-interest, expediency, moderation, and planning in accordance with economic and social laws' is remarkably similar to his description of Cropper's mind.⁷² Equalisation was essentially gradualist and could work within the context of the 1823 resolutions: Cropper had even gone so far as to say that the immediate removal of the protective duties could be catastrophic. In contrast, Heyrick's sugar boycott sought to by-pass the entire system of government and the abolitionist movement's reliance on Parliamentary legislation to force an immediate emancipation. She estimated that only one in ten British households had to abstain for slavery immediately to fall.⁷³ The rift between these two theorists became

⁶⁷ MSS Cropper Papers, vol. labelled 'Anti-Slavery Scraps,' D/CR/13, pp. 13-16. Phillpotts believed that these tracts exhibited a 'dangerous tendency' and represented a 'hazard to the public tranquillity.'

⁶⁸ This condemnation is quoted in the *Newcastle Chronicle*, 3 April 1824. One such sympathetic party was the editor of the *Sheffield Iris*, 30 March 1824.

⁶⁹ William Beverley stated that 'his opinion would have inclined him to wait a little longer, before petitioning, in order to see what steps Parliament would adopt.' *Hull Advertiser*, 1 December 1825.

⁷⁰ *Hull Advertiser*, 16 December 1825.

⁷¹ David Brion Davis, 'The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought,' *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. xlix., 2 (1962), pp. 213-215.

⁷² Davis, 'Immediatism,' p. 230; Davis, 'James Cropper, 1821-23,' especially, p. 258.

⁷³ Elizabeth Heyrick, *No British Slavery* (Leicester, 1824).

clear in June 1824, following the publication of *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition*, Cropper was critical of the views of some members of the London Committee who favoured immediate abolition. He was not alone: three other committee members disagreed with the content of an address submitted to the Committee in favour of abstention and a special committee meeting had to be called to discuss the issue.⁷⁴ This rift between gradualist equalisation and immediatist abstention also extended to the grass-roots level. Some abolitionist used their approval of equalisation to assert their gradualist credentials.⁷⁵ At a meeting in Newcastle, one speaker fiercely opposed the accusation of immediatism and endorsed the equalisation campaign.⁷⁶ One of Cropper's biggest exponents, Daniel Sykes, persistently rallied the Hull and East Riding Anti-Slavery Association around the 'present amelioration... and future extinction' of slavery. In 1830, Sykes' appeal widened only so far as 'speedy abolition,' and in April 1831, he still demanded amelioration as opposed to emancipation in the Commons.⁷⁷ At one level, gradualism and equalisation could be synonymous.

However, in another respect equalisation attested a desire to see action of a form taken to ensure the destruction of slavery. Gradual though that destruction may have been in design, equalisation constituted one aspect of a growing impatience with government inactivity. In 1825, pressure for abstention, the growth of ladies' associations and the equalisation of the sugar duties similarly indicated a growing disillusionment with the current path. At the meeting in Newcastle mentioned above, a speaker advocated greater intervention by the government, and insisted that the Ministry 'either let us have East Indian sugars on equal terms, or else let these West Indians act like men and Christians.'⁷⁸ Others went further: in March 1825, Zachary Macaulay noted that there had been 'much discussion and much correspondence among Anti-Slavery folks in London and in various parts of the country' on the question of immediatism.⁷⁹ The point to note is that at the local level the equalisation and abstention campaigns co-existed far more harmoniously than the categorisation of 'gradualist' and 'immediatist' may suggest. Samuel Roberts, the Sheffield abolitionist and

⁷⁴ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 8 June 1824. The precise nature of his views are not stated but his previous articles and the circulation of Heyrick's pamphlet to the committee suggest that he objected to statements made by some members in favour of immediatism through abstention.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁷⁶ *Newcastle Chronicle*, 3 April 1824.

⁷⁷ *Hull Advertiser*, 15 October 1830; David Eltis, 'Dr. Stephen Lushington and the campaign to abolish slavery in the British empire,' *Journal of Caribbean History*, vol. 1 (November 1970), p. 44.

⁷⁸ *Newcastle Chronicle*, 3 April 1824.

⁷⁹ Letter from Zachary Macaulay to Henry Brougham, 25 March 1825, quoted in Edith F. Hurwitz, *Politics and the Public Conscience: Slave emancipation and the abolitionist movement in Britain* (1973), p. 32.

pamphleteer, found a place for equalisation within his own forthright campaign for the adoption of immediatism.⁸⁰ Moreover, the new ladies' societies often felt that equalisation was consistent with their own appeals for immediatism and abstention.⁸¹ Indeed, Heyrick, when appealing to the 'hearts and consciences' of British women, said of equalisation: 'When we consider the heavy weight of national guilt which it would remove, the wide channels for national industry which it would open, - to what object of equal moment can we solicit the attention of our countrywomen?'⁸² Equalisation was not disavowed by immediatists but was given in a supporting role.

The result of this increasing frustration with the current path was that petitioning merely 'to strengthen the hand of government' looked inadequate by 1826. The Third Report of the Anti-Slavery Society asked that the new petitions to Parliament include an appeal for the direct intervention of the government in colonial affairs.⁸³ Considerations of this kind extended to the hustings. Bell, an MP for Newcastle who stood again in 1826, was taken to task by an anonymous abolitionist, writing under the name 'Las Casas,' who complained of the former's willingness to rely on the government's resolutions. Casas claimed that the gentlemen of Newcastle-upon-Tyne were called upon to send MPs to Parliament 'for no efficient purpose, inquisitorial or legislative, but only as puppets to dance as the Ministry for the time being may please...'⁸⁴ In the mid-1820s, an ideology of movement had developed in contrast to the 'wait and see' attitude which promised only stagnation. Again this feeling moved ahead of the London abolitionists who lamented that 'not a few' of the petitions of 1826 had expressed opinions which they did not endorse.⁸⁵ By the 1826 campaign, the erosion of the gradualist mentality was underway.

This increasing frustration, the ideology of movement, could thus absorb both the equalisation and abstention appeals. The gradualist mentality was weakened when provincial abolitionists expressed a unanimous commitment to direct action of any kind against slavery, to taking the matter out of the hands of the ministry and the planters. Abolitionists who were committed to direct action through equalisation

⁸⁰ *Sheffield Mercury*, 7 June 1828.

⁸¹ Many drew on Cropper's critique of free labour in their annual reports. Dublin Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, *Rules and Resolutions of the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, with lists of the district treasurers, committee and secretaries, and of the subscribers* (Dublin, 1828); Ladies Association for Salisbury, &c., *The Third Annual Report of the Ladies Association for Salisbury, Calne, Melksham, Devizes, &c. in aid of the cause of Negro Emancipation; with a list of subscribers. Established 1825* (Calne, 1828).

⁸² [Elizabeth Heyrick], *Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences of British Women* (Leicester, 1828).

⁸³ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 7, December 1825.

⁸⁴ Handbill: 'Mr. Bell and Slavery - To the Electors of Northumberland.' Northumberland Record Office, NRO 3948/65.

⁸⁵ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 14, July 1826.

could still oppose immediatist policies. At the Leeds public meeting of January 1826, resolutions were passed favouring equalisation and direct intervention but the Reverend Thomas Scales' proposal for the adoption of abstention was countered by one speaker who said that the boycott 'seemed to convey something of a threat,' while another viewed abstention as 'prejudicial to the cause itself, [and] highly improper.' Scales eventually withdrew his motion to ensure that all resolutions were passed unanimously.⁸⁶ At the same meeting, several abolitionists attempted to fix the time for amelioration, which also threatened to split the meeting.⁸⁷ The strong desire for unanimity in petitions and resolutions resulted in the withdrawal of contentious motions at public meetings and frequently hindered the adoption of more radical aspects of the abolitionist campaign. This may explain the slow adoption of immediatism by male auxiliaries who conducted their business principally through public meetings.

How effective was Heyrick's *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* as a promoter of immediatism? Midgley has persuasively argued for the rapid dissemination of Heyrick's ideas. Abstention was a very public campaign and one of the few instances where women used the press. Moreover, reviews of *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* appeared in the *Baptist Magazine* and the *Christian Observer* shortly after publication thus reaching deep into the evangelical and non-conformist base of organised abolitionism.⁸⁸ The evidence extracted from Clarkson's tour illustrates the interest expressed in the sugar-boycott across the country in these months: the Carlisle committee's disapproval of abstention in September 1824 clearly owed a great deal to Heyrick's pamphlet, thus illustrating its wide impact though not always with a positive outcome.⁸⁹ However, whether the widespread distribution of Heyrick's first work contributed to the spread of immediatism, as opposed to abstention, is unclear. We have already seen that abstention and immediatism were not necessarily synonymous in all eyes. Midgley has drawn a convincing connection between Heyrick's tract and a famous immediatism speech made by Andrew Thomson in Edinburgh in 1830, but also concedes that the *Baptist Magazine* review focused on abstention and not the immediate emancipation it was intended to promote.⁹⁰ Heyrick's pamphlet was evidently less successful in disseminating immediatism than abstention: while abstention became a duty of grass-roots abolitionism, immediatism

⁸⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 28 January 1826. Benjamin Sadler, who argued that the movement should not split over abstention, was a relative of Michael Sadler, one of the principal exponents of the factory reform movement.

⁸⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 28 January 1826.

⁸⁸ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 113.

⁸⁹ MSS Clarkson's diary: 16 September 1824.

⁹⁰ Midgley, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-114.

was not formally adopted by any organised group until 1827. Abstention was a matter of personal morality and, as the Dublin ladies put it, 'one of the best modes of expressing an abhorrence of the system of Colonial slavery.'⁹¹ The full import of Heyrick's argument did not permeate provincial abolitionist support for several years. Nevertheless, abstention can clearly be seen as an important step in the development of immediatism. James Stephen was the first of the abolitionist leadership to endorse abstention and was later one of the first to endorse immediatism in 1830.⁹² Furthermore, some authors who openly favoured immediatism but expressed their disquiet over aspects of it (especially the threat of slave insurrections) advocated abstention as an important first stage.⁹³

While the propensity of abolitionists to ignore the immediatism of Heyrick's argument presented one problem, another significant stumbling block towards the adoption of immediatism was abolitionism's 'civilising mission.' Anti-slavery was concerned with the creation of a new productive society in the West Indies, not just the abolition of slavery. The abolitionists expected slave societies in the British West Indies to undergo the development of western Europe, from villeinage to waged labour, at an accelerated rate.⁹⁴ Some abolitionists clearly felt that to adopt immediatism was to abandon all attempts at a 'civilising mission.' As Clarkson noted:

'They [the Carlisle committee] concerned this to be the worst Measure possible because if there was no Consumption for W. India Produce, the Masters would not be able to maintain the Labourers - There would be in this Case either be a Convulsion during which both Masters & Slaves would suffer, or the Slaves would retire into the woods & lead there a savage life. But if they were Savages in the Woods, how could you get at them to civilise them?... If therefore Civilisation be an Object, Abstinence from Sugar did not appear to them to be a proper Measure.'⁹⁵

Clarkson frequently insisted that intention of amelioration was 'gradually to introduce [the slaves] to the rank of a free peasantry.'⁹⁶ This plan seemed threatened by abstention.

⁹¹ Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, *Rules and Resolutions of the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, with lists of the district treasurers, committee and secretaries, and of the subscribers* (Dublin, 1828).

⁹² MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 15 December 1824; MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 18 May 1830.

⁹³ *York Herald*, 11 March 1826.

⁹⁴ David Eltis, 'Abolitionists perceptions of society after slavery,' in J. Walvin (ed.), *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846* (1982), p. 202.

⁹⁵ MSS Clarkson's diary: 16 September 1824.

⁹⁶ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 31 January 1824.

Demerara also raised a critical problem. The rebellion showed that even educated Christian slaves were capable of rebellion. Slave rebellions sparked conflicting interpretations among the abolitionists. Moderates, thrown on to the defensive by plantocrat accusations, viewed rebellion as proof that the slaves were, for the moment, unfit for society and that the gradual mitigation of their condition was an essential preparatory first step to freedom. One Welsh abolitionist advocated a thirteen year plan to convert the rising generation of slaves into 'an useful and enlightened third estate of society' who would then educate the next generation of slaves or purchase their freedom.⁹⁷ Slave resistance suggested to some abolitionists that, following immediate emancipation, slave society would not develop along the lines which they hoped.

Other abolitionists, however, saw attack as the best form of defence and propagated a more radical view of the Demerara insurrection. At the formation of the Hull and East Riding Society, a few months after the revolt, one speaker noted that 'instead of calling it an insurrection BY the slaves, it was an insurrection UPON them.'⁹⁸ In this view, slavery itself was the rebellion, a rebellion against decency, justice and humanity. Another local abolitionist, P. H. Howard of Carlisle, said that 'the insurrection of slaves has always something secret, something volcanic about it. In the zenith of the Roman empire, Spartacus, at the head of the slaves, almost upset it at an instant. We should benefit by example.' Thus slavery itself constituted a violent internal threat to the British Empire.⁹⁹ In both these interpretations, abolitionists used the insurrection to advocate greater urgency and more forceful efforts to abolish slavery. The same arguments would be raised with greater force and appeal in the aftermath of the Jamaican rebellion of 1831.

The violent agency of individual blacks threatened to overthrow the representation of the slave as the 'passive victim.' As Midgley says 'Heyrick realised that to gain support for immediate emancipation it was vital to provide an alternative analysis of these insurrections.' Heyrick contrasted the peaceful resistance of the slaves to the violence and brutality of the whites and, in this way, argued that no amount of mitigation could be expected from the planters or was necessary.¹⁰⁰ What evolved from the defence of slave insurrection was a belief that only the experience of freedom could prepare the slave for it. Davis has noted how 'the years of bloodshed and

⁹⁷ *The Cambrian*, 9 April 1824.

⁹⁸ *Hull Advertiser*, 7 November 1823.

⁹⁹ *Carlisle Patriot*, 10 February 1826.

¹⁰⁰ *An Enquiry Which of the Two Parties is Best Entitled to Freedom? The Slave or the Slave-holder?* (1824) referred to in Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 106.

anarchy in Haiti became an international symbol for the dangers of reckless and unplanned emancipation.¹⁰¹ But those who became enamoured with immediatism quickly inverted the Haiti case and used it to show the natural and beneficial results of granting freedom without preparation. At a public meeting in Sheffield, William Fairbank raised the example of St. Domingo and said that 'if an end was to be put to this abominable system, let it be done speedily and most effectually.'¹⁰² Samuel Roberts noted that Haiti showed 'that free negroes will not only work, but that they are capable of governing, as well as of being governed.'¹⁰³ Re-interpreting rebellions and the rapid overthrow of colonial society was a formative step on the path to immediatism.

The erosion of gradualism, the commitment to movement and the reinterpretation of slave rebellions paved the way for the development of immediatism. But its adoption by abolitionists across the country was by no means straightforward. Immediatism was an ambiguous term: it could apply to the instantaneous forbearance of slave produce, the rejection of 'intermediate agencies' or the freeing of all slaves without delay.¹⁰⁴ As early as 1824, the inhabitants of the borough of Stafford petitioned for the adoption 'of some effectual and decisive measures for meliorating the condition and affecting the Immediate or gradual emancipation of the Slave Population,' although no definition of either has survived.¹⁰⁵ The *York Herald* had 'particular pleasure' in offering to their readers 'the *specific proposition for immediate abolition*' which had been raised at a meeting in Bath in 1826, yet the measure proposed, in opposition to 'the temporising policy' of gradual abolition, was the immediate freeing of all female slaves only and thus the emancipation of the whole slave population over a period of generations.¹⁰⁶ For abolitionists petitioning in 1828, the words 'speedy abolition' could downplay divisions between gradualists and immediatists.¹⁰⁷ When the Sheffield Ladies Society became the first anti-slavery society in Britain to sanction immediate abolition in 1827 it accepted the possibility of a temporary 'feudal' state, unlike Heyrick.¹⁰⁸ Immediatism was an extremely malleable concept and as such support for it was not always consistent. Roberts, one of immediatism's first and most outspoken advocates, denied that he wanted immediate abolition at a meeting in 1828: 'he would do by that as he would an old building he wanted removing: take proper means to

¹⁰¹ Davis, 'Immediatism,' p. 216.

¹⁰² *Sheffield Mercury*, 14 June 1828.

¹⁰³ Samuel Roberts, *The Tocsin; or, Slavery the Curse of Christendom* (Sheffield, 1825).

¹⁰⁴ Davis, 'Immediatism,' pp. 209-210.

¹⁰⁵ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 24 January 1824.

¹⁰⁶ *York Herald*, 11 February 1826.

¹⁰⁷ Defining the meanings of amelioration and gradual abolition became stumbling blocks for abolitionists at these meetings. See, for example, *Leeds Mercury*, 10 May 1828.

¹⁰⁸ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 107.

remove it, and not blow it up with half a dozen barrels of gunpowder.’¹⁰⁹ The Sheffield ladies were also uncertain about immediatism in 1828 and 1829.

If we look at the Sheffield case in greater detail we can see how immediatism was a divisive issue.¹¹⁰ Samuel Roberts (1763-1848) was the second son of an Sheffield manufacturer engaged in the silver-plating business. After working for his father until the age of twenty-one, Roberts began his own business in the same trade which, by his late-twenties, enabled him to devote considerable time and effort to benevolent causes as a writer and activist. In 1804, he became an Overseer of the Poor and, on account of his opposition to the Poor Law, was nicknamed ‘the Pauper’s Advocate.’ He was a founding member of a local society against the use of ‘climbing boys’ and opened a correspondence with Wilberforce on this matter, which lasted over twenty years and expanded to include many other issues.¹¹¹ Roberts was involved in the petition campaign for the repeal of the Orders in Council in 1812 and petitioned against the renewal of the French slave-trade in 1814.¹¹² He was also extremely critical of the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels act, one of the infamous Six Acts which came into force in 1819 but remained in force until 1869-70.¹¹³ In particular he chastised Wilberforce for his support of the acts and claimed that punishments meted out for the publication of tracts of a blasphemous or obscene nature was inherently unchristian.¹¹⁴ In later years, he supported missionary activity, the Bible Society and became known at the national level as an opponent of the new Poor Law. Turley has used Roberts to show the middle-class reform complex in action but Roberts was also one of the first abolitionists to support immediate emancipation which he advocated at public meetings, in letters to the press and in numerous pamphlets in the ten years after the revival of the campaign.¹¹⁵

In March 1823, Wilberforce urged Roberts to organise an anti-slavery petition from Sheffield. The requisition presented to the Mayor contained almost sixty signatures

¹⁰⁹ *Sheffield Mercury*, 14 June 1828.

¹¹⁰ For the purposes of the following case study I have taken immediatism to mean a disavowal of ‘intermediate agencies’ and the advocacy of measures to free the slaves without delay.

¹¹¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, entry for Samuel Roberts; Colin Holmes, ‘Samuel Roberts and the Gypsies,’ in Sidney Pollard and Colin Holmes (eds), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Sheffield, 1976), pp. 235-236; MSS Correspondence of Samuel Roberts, Sheffield Archives.

¹¹² MSS Samuel Roberts Correspondence: No. 6, William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 17 February 1812; No. 10, Wilberforce to Roberts, 5 May 1814.

¹¹³ D. G. Wright, *Popular Radicalism - The working-class experience, 1780-1880* (London, 1988), p. 96.

¹¹⁴ MSS Samuel Roberts Letters: No. 29, Wilberforce to Roberts, 24 December 1819.

¹¹⁵ Turley, *op.cit.*, pp. 121-123.

including several of the town's most prominent philanthropists and citizens.¹¹⁶ The Sheffield petition was founded on a religious condemnation of slavery and its effects, a system 'contrary to the spirit of the Christian Religion... [and] plainly repugnant to the Word of Almighty God.' Since the inhuman conduct of the West Indian plantocracy had rendered the slaves 'unfit for the *immediate* enjoyment of freedom,' the petitioners were 'ready to admit the propriety and necessity of preparatory attention' to the discipline of the slaves.¹¹⁷ But, crucially, the petitioners argued that 'no projected amelioration in [the slaves'] unhappy condition can fully meet the justice of the case, which does not contemplate avowedly, as its chief and final object, the radical and total extermination of the system itself.' Although the second resolution of the meeting originally appealed for 'gradual and total' abolition, this was changed to 'radical' in the wording of the petition.¹¹⁸ The demands made in the Sheffield petition were notably stronger than those from other towns across the country, although petitioners in 1823 had greater latitude in determining their demands than in later years. It is reasonable to assume that Roberts had a hand in the creation of the petition: he was experienced in raising petitions from Sheffield, he had been directly contacted by Wilberforce to do so, and he had advocated immediate abolition at this time in a pamphlet entitled *A Letter to John Bull*.¹¹⁹ The Sheffield petition was not explicitly immediatist but nevertheless expressed sentiments which were unlikely to be sated by Canning's counter-resolutions.

Roberts became more explicitly immediatist in the following years. This may have stemmed from his increasing disillusionment with the Parliamentary leadership which he forcefully expressed in a number of pamphlets from 1825. 'Every shadowy bugbear which the planter and their friends set up, has served to frighten the abolitionists from doing their duty.' Not only were they 'consenting parties' to the continuance of slavery but Roberts alleged that they 'fear and obey men more than God,' a charge which had frequently been made against the planters. Roberts openly avowed a policy of immediate abolition: "'Do nothing rashly,'" he noted, 'is as much the cry now as ever... Yes, let the tiger alone with the lamb that he has taken; don't offer to rescue it; let him only lick it and play with it a little while, and then you'll see that he will let it go quietly.' Moreover, disillusionment with Parliament, the planters and the abolitionists left only one body to whom Roberts could look for redress: 'The abolition of slavery must be the work of the PEOPLE. Though the Legislature may be

¹¹⁶ *Sheffield Mercury*, 26 April 1823.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 May 1823.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Samuel Roberts, *A Letter to John Bull. With a Sketch of a Plan for the Safe, Speedy and Effectual Abolition of Slavery* (Sheffield, 1823).

called omnipotent, the people are stronger still.’¹²⁰ How this was to be accomplished was a matter on which Roberts was unclear although his appeal that ‘the feelings of the country should be freely, plainly, and loudly expressed,’ made before the public meeting in Sheffield in January 1826, implied a commitment to petitioning. When Roberts renewed his appeal to the ‘*British public*’ for the total and immediate abolition of slavery in 1827, he appeared only to promote petitioning once more. Abstention was not a feature of any of his appeals.

On 21st June 1825, ten months after the creation of a men’s auxiliary in Sheffield, a ladies’ society for the ‘Mitigation of the Condition of the Oppressed Children of Africa, and particularly of Negro Slaves in our West Indian Colonies,’ was formed in the town under the direction of the Female Society for Birmingham.¹²¹ The committee was drawn almost exclusively from the families of local male supporters of the cause. The Sheffield Ladies Society, in contrast to the local male auxiliary, was extremely active: in its first year, 1,400 pamphlets and many more *Monthly Reporters* were distributed, 278 workbags sold, and there had been ‘some endeavours’ to promote the consumption of East India sugar.¹²² In its second year, the ladies’ society organised a comprehensive canvass of the town in the course of which they found ‘in the hearts of the humbler class of their townspeople, a spring of compassion, which might be opened, a chord of feeling which might be touched.’ At the end of 1827, the Sheffield Ladies Society became the first of its kind to advocate immediate and total abolition:

‘Behold the spectre from which the boldest have shrunk back in black dismay, and which was sufficient to shake the strongest nerves; and never did grim spectre turn out a more perfectly innocent object of alarm, than this much depreciated, and much dreaded, *immediate and total abolition*.’¹²³

The reason for the Ladies’ Society’s sudden advocacy of immediatism is unknown. Midgley attributes their action to Heyrick’s *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition*.¹²⁴ Certainly, the observations made on the sugar canvass in the second report implies

¹²⁰ Samuel Roberts, *The Tocsin; or, Slavery the Curse of Christendom* (Sheffield, 1825).

¹²¹ Sheffield Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves circular, begins: ‘At a meeting held at Sheffield, on the 21st of June, 1825...’ Midgley states that the Sheffield ladies society was formed on 12th July 1825 (*Women Against Slavery*, p. 47), but this circular and the minute book of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society indicate that the 21st June 1825 is the correct date.

¹²² Elizabeth Reid, the treasurer, was the wife of Joseph Reid and their daughter, Mary Ann Rawson, rapidly became the society’s principal figure; the wives of the abolitionist preachers Sutton, Newbould and Naish were members; and one of Samuel Roberts’ daughters, Mary, was a founding committee member and became the society’s second secretary. Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, [*First*] *Report of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, established midsummer 1825* (Sheffield, 1826).

¹²³ Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, [*Second*] *Report of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society. Established midsummer 1825* (Sheffield, 1827).

¹²⁴ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 107.

that abstention provided the impetus.¹²⁵ The Sheffield ladies advocated abstention as the means at everyone's disposal for immediately ending slavery and reminded sceptics that 'the aggregate is composed of individuals.' However, it is equally possible that the Sheffield Ladies were influenced by Samuel Roberts. His pamphlet *The Tocsin; or, Slavery the Curse of Christendom* (1825) marked a firm step towards immediatism, and in the following year, seven months before the *Second Report*, he attempted to press immediatism on a local public meeting but his arguments were dismissed.¹²⁶ A second pamphlet written by Roberts and published in 1827 (*Tocsin the Second*) advocated immediatism more fiercely than before. Roberts alleged that Britain had hypocritically proclaimed herself a Christian nation while remaining content with gradualism, 'that insulting compromise.' At the time that the Ladies society adopted immediatism, Roberts' daughter, Mary (who lived with her father at Park Grange), was its secretary and thus provided a direct channel for his ideas. There is certainly a hint in Roberts' work that he found female supporters were more willing to entertain his views than local male abolitionists.¹²⁷

If the Sheffield Ladies Society was influenced by Roberts, and indeed their men-folk more generally, this may explain why they distanced themselves from immediate abolition in the following two years. The public meeting in Sheffield on 9th June 1828 turned into a pitched battle fought over the issue of immediacy where once again Roberts was in a minority. In advance of the meeting, Roberts wrote to the *Sheffield Mercury* to condemn those who sought to sanction the 'longer continuance' of slavery through gradualism. Following the reading of gradualist resolutions, put forward by James Montgomery, a great radical newspaper editor in the 1790s, Roberts submitted three counter-resolutions to the meeting which stressed the sinfulness of slavery and desired its immediate and total abolition. Though they were adopted for a short time, Roberts' resolutions were eventually thrown out and the original resolutions restored.¹²⁸ Immediatism proved to be a highly divisive force at the public meeting in Sheffield in 1828 and this may have influenced the ladies' society. Reverend Thomas Smith, Roberts' principal critic at the meeting, was married to the Ladies Society's treasurer, while another member of their committee was the wife of Reverend Sutton, who had seconded the gradualist resolutions. In their *Fourth Report*, the Ladies Society stated that 'on the danger of immediate emancipation we are ourselves incompetent to judge, from our limited knowledge of the state of society in the

¹²⁵ Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, [*Second*] *Report of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society. Established midsummer 1825* (Sheffield, 1827).

¹²⁶ *Sheffield Iris*, 24 January 1826.

¹²⁷ When discussing the comparable plight of the slaves and the chimney boys, he remarked that no man and 'I am sure not a woman' could support the continuance of either. *Sheffield Mercury*, 7 June 1828.

¹²⁸ *Sheffield Mercury*, 14 June 1828.

Colonies, and of the political relations by which the question is grounded.¹²⁹ It was at this time, that Ladies Society came under specific criticism for their supposed disavowal of the principle of amelioration.¹³⁰ The ladies' approval of immediatism was certainly a bold step in opposition to the majority of their menfolk but this does not mean that they could necessarily prolong their approval of this measure.

Roberts continued to put pressure on the men's auxiliary in the days following the public meeting. He was evidently spurred on by public support for his resolutions: the *Sheffield Mercury*, in reporting the meeting, could conceive of no other remedy than immediate abolition although the meeting had voted down the measure.¹³¹ Roberts lashed out at Reverend Smith in a short pamphlet in which he attacked the petition for gradual abolition then in circulation:

'No matter under what modification or for what period, they [petitions for gradual abolition] all acknowledge its allowableness - they all sanction its continuance - they all admit a right in men to enslave his fellow-creatures, and to trade in the souls of MEN. All such Petitions ought to be headed in capitals "PETITION FOR THE CONTINUANCE OF SLAVERY!"'¹³²

Roberts went further and raised a rival petition for the immediate and total abolition of slavery. The Ladies Society recorded that the two petitions were 'more numerously signed than at any former period.'¹³³ It is likely that the petition for immediate abolition drew on working-class supporters who have been canvassed by the women's society. 'A layman volunteer' wrote a short pamphlet conferring 'honours' on Roberts for his letter to Smith and his other local works for the poor shortly after the debate.¹³⁴ The Third Report of the Ladies' Society, printed some four months after the public meeting, noted that 'there is an increase of right feeling and of zeal amongst our townspeople, which hath been evinced in their earnestness in applications to parliament, during the last session.' The ladies also noted that 'what remains in the power of the people appears to be the firm and persevering language of petition,' and

¹²⁹ Sheffield Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Sheffield Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society for 1829* (Sheffield, 1829).

¹³⁰ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 108.

¹³¹ *Sheffield Mercury*, 14 June 1828.

¹³² Samuel Roberts, *A Letter to the Reverend Thomas Smith, A.M. on the subject of Slavery with some remarks on his conduct at the late meeting, held at the Cutler's Hall, on the ninth June* (Sheffield, 1828).

¹³³ Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, *The Third Annual Report of the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, Sheffield. Read at the meeting, on Tuesday, October 14, 1828* (Sheffield, 1828).

¹³⁴ Anon, *Honours conferred on Samuel Roberts, Esq., author of The Scrutineer, for his letter addressed to the Rev. Thomas Smith A.M. on the subject of Slavery; and, containing critical observations on the other most remarkable productions of this public character* (Sheffield, 1828).

not abstention.¹³⁵ As the ladies society did not organise a petition of their own at this time, this may further suggest that they assisted in raising the immediatist petition.

Davis has noted the obvious link between immediatism and 'a religious sense of immediate justification and presence of the divine spirit' that can be traced back to the spiritualism of non-conformity and evangelicalism.¹³⁶ Both the ladies society and Roberts based their appeals on purely moral grounds. Roberts insisted that 'either Slavery is sinful and ought to be totally and immediately abolished; or it is not sinful, and therefore allowable, if expedient.'¹³⁷ The Ladies Society similarly remarked that 'there is one invariable principle of justice, an eternal distinction between right and wrong.'¹³⁸ By virtue of its moral simplicity, immediatism could have an extremely wide appeal, far wider than the complicated mechanics of equalisation could illicit. There was, however, a minor difference between the arguments used by the ladies society and those used by Roberts, of a manner suggestive of the appeal of immediatism to the sexes. The women's auxiliary's immediatism was based around abstention through which abstinence became a statement of personal moral worth - the salvation of the individual was directly implicated.¹³⁹ By contrast, Roberts argued that 'the enlightened public' had been made 'unwilling parties' to slavery's continuance through the failings of the government, planters and abolitionist leadership. He argued for the inherent moral worth of the general public but argued that by failing to emancipate the slaves, by committing this moral crime, gradualists were 'insulting God.'¹⁴⁰ Roberts' arguments in *The Tocsin* and *Tocsin the Second* condemned the nation's professed Christianity but upheld the innate morality of her people. For Roberts, the salvation of Britain was directly implicated. Both the Ladies' Society and Roberts shared a common belief in the power of the divine spirit, but while Sheffield's women sought to unleash inner moral force, Roberts looked to God as the agent of slavery's destruction: 'the number is increasing who *dare* to put there trust in God,' he wrote.¹⁴¹ In this way, immediatism could 'empower' the individual by

¹³⁵ Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, *The Third Annual Report of the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, Sheffield. Read at the meeting, on Tuesday, October 14, 1828* (Sheffield, 1828).

¹³⁶ Davis, 'Immediatism,' p. 228.

¹³⁷ Samuel Roberts, *A Letter to the Reverend Thomas Smith, A.M. on the subject of Slavery with some remarks on his conduct at the late meeting, held at the Cutler's Hall, on the ninth June* (Sheffield, 1828).

¹³⁸ Sheffield Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Sheffield Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society for 1829* (Sheffield, 1829).

¹³⁹ Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, *[Second] Report of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society. Established midsummer 1825* (Sheffield, 1827).

¹⁴⁰ *Sheffield Mercury*, 14 June 1828; *Tocsin the 2nd*.

¹⁴¹ Samuel Roberts, *Slavery - Its Evils and Remedy*, 2nd edn. (Sheffield, 1829); Davis, 'Immediatism,' p. 230.

stressing personal morality, as in the case of the Sheffield ladies, or draw on the fear of divine retribution, as in Roberts' case.

The spread of immediatism in other towns is far more difficult to discern. Its adoption across the country in the late 1820s was sporadic, inconsistent and relatively disorganised. As Clare Midgley has suggested, the network of women's societies is the only organisation which can lay claim to have organised immediatism on a systematic basis.¹⁴² The attempts made by the Female Society for Birmingham to organise abstention across the country predisposed women abolitionists to immediatism, if it did not instantly convert them. As the Clifton and London Ladies' Anti-Slavery societies felt the need to publish and widely distribute *A Vindication of Female Anti-Slavery Associations* in defence of their immediatism shows that the Birmingham group may have been successful.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, it is clear that the moral and religious fervour which lay at the foundations of immediate abolition in Sheffield reappeared in most towns. In Leeds, John Yewdall refused to sign the inhabitants petition of 1828 while 'there were expressions in it which tolerated, for any length of time however short, the existence of slavery - It was sinful, and ought not to exist a moment longer, and as to consequences, they must leave them in the hands of the Almighty.' It is also significant that immediate abolition took hold at the end of the 1820s when religious groups flocked to the cause: it was not until the creation of the Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters Association for the Abolition of Slavery was formed in September 1829 that immediatism took hold in Leeds. This association argued that slavery had been approached as a political and not a religious question: 'too long have we, in common with the friends of humanity around us, wasted our time and efforts in vain attempts to ameliorate the condition of our fellow-creatures... with a view to their gradual Emancipation.'¹⁴⁴ Immediatism finally took hold at the time when women's societies were flourishing and religious denominations threw themselves behind the cause.

COLONIAL SLAVERY VS. DOMESTIC SLAVERY

¹⁴² Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 108.

¹⁴³ Clifton and London Ladies' Anti-Slavery Societies, *A Vindication of Female Anti-Slavery Associations* (1828).

¹⁴⁴ Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters Association for the Abolition of Slavery circular, begins: 'At a Meeting of Friends of the Abolition of Negro Slavery, held in Leeds, on Monday, September 28th, 1829...' (Leeds, 1829).

While female societies canvassed the working-class to promote the sugar boycott, the sugar question in its wider form brought abolitionists to consider their relationship with the problems of the British labouring population. The long-standing historiographical debate over the 'class hegemonic thesis of social control'¹⁴⁵ has focused on the period before 1823 and the years of reform agitation in the early 1830s. However, abolitionist agitation in the 1820s was notable for the increasing cognisance of 'wage slavery' arguments. Antislavery's supposed displacement function was a feature of the debates between abolitionists and their opponents from 1823. West Indian propagandists alleged that the abolitionists were hypocritical to campaign for the relief of blacks in the colonies while the British labourer worked under supposedly similar conditions. Working-class radicals also joined the attack. Nevertheless, despite these intense pressures, the changing ideology of anti-slavery, especially Cropper's equalisation campaign, had already moved abolitionists to consider their opponents' case. Long before Oastler wrote his famous letter on 'Yorkshire slavery' and Orator Hunt interrupted the General Meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society with his charge of hypocrisy, the domestic slavery argument had been confronted by local abolitionists.

The central question posed by historians is whether a comparison with slave labour was used to extol the virtues of the free labour system or even to condone its ills. Drescher has argued that antislavery was not 'one of the principal symbolic arsenals of laissez-faire ideologists.' No prominent free-trade thinker in the generation after Adam Smith sought to validate the concept of free labour through a comparison of it with the labour of slaves.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, J. B. Say argued that slave labour was practical and efficient in tropical colonial possessions. However, this merely indicates that the exponents of classical political economy did not use slavery to bolster their claims; it does not dismiss the charge that abolitionists eulogised the free labour system. For this, it is far more important to consider the case in reverse: did the abolitionists condemn slavery in such a way that the free labour system was praised? This was undeniably the by-product of their arguments: the pamphlets of Cropper and Hodgson claimed not only the superiority of free labour but its role in the eventual destruction of slavery. Hodgson wrote a reply to J. B. Say in which he criticised Say's conclusions and argued that the adoption of slave-labour systems in tropical regions was entirely impolitic.¹⁴⁷ Cropper's equalisation argument and the Liverpool Society's comparison of free and slave labour was incorporated into the London Anti-Slavery Society's

¹⁴⁵ Drescher's term used in Seymour Drescher, 'Cart Whip and Billy Roller: Antislavery and reform symbolism in industrialising Britain,' *Journal of Social History*, 15, (1981), p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Drescher, 'Cart Whip and Billy Roller,' p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Adam Hodgson, *A Letter to M. Jean-Baptiste Say, on the comparative expense of free and slave labour*, 2nd edn. (Liverpool, 1823).

official stance by the end of 1824. From the first moments of the revived campaign, slave labour and free labour were compared in such a way that the latter was depicted as the agent of progress.

The abolitionists eulogised the efficiency of free labour as a self-evident fact; they had no need to consider actual domestic conditions to justify their case. Their analysis proceeded from a hypothetical confrontation between free and slave labour, not a consideration of the practical differences between the two. These practical differences were questioned by the West Indians and their supporters who rapidly developed the domestic slavery argument as another weapon in their arsenal. From 1823, perhaps earlier in Cropper's case, provincial abolitionists found that the state of the working population of Britain was thrown in their way. The first arguments attempted merely to counter the abolitionists' depiction of life on the plantations but beneath was an accusation of hypocrisy or short-sightedness. John Gladstone frequently commented on the superior condition of life enjoyed by the slave to that suffered by the British labourer although his own plantation, Success, had been the scene of rapacious forced cultivation and appalling conditions.¹⁴⁸ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* noted the same in a piece highly critical of the motives and methods of the 'Mitigation Society.'¹⁴⁹ These arguments incorporated the stereotypical allegation of black laziness. The editor of the *Macclesfield Courier* insisted that the slave was asked to perform only a small amount of work for his maintenance, 'about as much in the course of a day as an ordinary English labourer would perform in three hours,' but still he would not work and thus received the stimulus of beatings.¹⁵⁰ Cropper was denounced as being either 'profoundly ignorant' or 'wilfully deceitful' in his description of slave conditions by one newspaper editor.¹⁵¹ A Cork newspaper, commenting on the local society's first petition in 1826, urged that 'everyone should sign it, no matter it emanating from a body hostile to freedom at home.'¹⁵² The argument reached its peak in 1828 with the presentation of a petition to the House of Commons from West Indian merchants and planters in Bury Saint Edmunds which appealed for the establishment of an impartial commission 'to compare the condition of the Slaves in [the British West Indian colonies] with the labourers of this country.'¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ See *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 November 1823.

¹⁴⁹ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, No. 81, October 1823, Volume 14, p. 442.

¹⁵⁰ *Macclesfield Courier*, 3 April 1824.

¹⁵¹ MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/13, p. 26 - unnamed article, n.d.

¹⁵² *Freeholder*, 1 January 1826, quoted in Harrison, 'Irish Quaker attitudes,' p. 110.

¹⁵³ *House of Commons Journals*, 22 July 1828.

While these arguments toyed with the issue of hypocrisy, a more direct and persistent deployment of the domestic slavery argument against the abolitionists came not from the West Indians but from other anti-abolitionist writers such as William Cobbett. Cobbett quickly turned his *Register* against the abolitionists, their non-conformist supporters and Wilberforce whom he had always hated. In *Rural Rides*, Cropper was characterised as ‘canting Jemmy’ after he advocated the factory system and mechanisation for Ireland. For the moment, the planters and radicals appeared united: the *Liverpool Mercury* labelled Cobbett ‘the Champion of Slavery’ shortly after his first assault on the abolitionists.¹⁵⁴

The abolitionists did not leave these allegations unanswered. The *Chester Guardian* attacked the arguments put forward in the *Macclesfield Courier*, as did other local newspapers and abolitionists at the Macclesfield anti-slavery meeting.¹⁵⁵ Local associations in Beverley, Hull and Whitby all dismissed the domestic slavery arguments put forward in *Cobbett’s Register* and *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*.¹⁵⁶ Many simply dismissed the validity of any comparison between the condition of the two parties but supported the principle of free labour’s efficiency in the abstract. Others, drawing from the heritage of libertarian philosophy, openly compared the slave’s condition with that of the peasant: as one speaker at the Buckinghamshire county meeting of January 1826 noted, the English peasant had ‘enjoyments few, comforts few, hardships many and difficult to endure; but rights, God be thanked, intact and intangible.’¹⁵⁷ This defence ran close to excusing the hardships of the labouring population on the grounds of abstract libertarian principle. But many more abolitionists engaged directly with the criticism and compared the state of both parties. In response to Rev. Bridges’ *Voice from Jamaica*, which was quoted at length in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in October 1823, the *Pottery Gazette and Newcastle Express* printed a table, running for several columns, which directly compared the peasant and the slave under different headings drawn from the measures recommended to the colonial legislatures in 1823.¹⁵⁸ In this way, abolitionists took the opportunity to explain their case to the labouring population in a way which sensitised them to the miseries of others but also alluded to comparable social ills in Britain.

These responses sought merely to show that the slaves in the West Indies were worse off than British labourers, not necessarily to extol the free labour system or its

¹⁵⁴ *Liverpool Mercury*, 4 June 1824.

¹⁵⁵ Anon., *The Macclesfield Courier versus the Anti-Slavery Meeting* (Macclesfield, 1824).

¹⁵⁶ Turley, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁵⁷ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 9, February 1826, pp. 87-88.

¹⁵⁸ *The Pottery Gazette and Newcastle Express*, n.d. in D/CR/13, pp. 156-159.

hardships in practice. The abolitionists needed only to show that black slaves suffered a greater ordeal not to discuss domestic problems. Some abolitionists, however, accepted and encouraged comparisons of the hardships of slaves and labourers as a perfectly valid topic for discussion. In some cases, as at the Buckinghamshire county meeting, the burdens of the working classes in Britain were acknowledged. In a letter to *The Cambrian* an abolitionist correspondent wrote against a plan for encouraging slaves to purchase their own freedom: it was like asking ‘the most wretched and degraded part of our labourers to lay by from 50*l* to 100*l* over and above their daily wants.’¹⁵⁹ Others actively encouraged comparisons between the two and tried to show a kinship between campaigns for combating the problems of slave and free labour. Whiteley’s conversion from the factory movement to the anti-slavery lobby, and his advocacy of legislation on both matters in *Three Months in Jamaica* has been discussed by Drescher.¹⁶⁰ Samuel Roberts too was an outspoken campaigner for the poor and urged the criminalisation of the use of climbing boys. In 1828, he combined these campaigns: Roberts argued that the government’s duty on East Indian sugar was as ridiculous as an hypothetical government tax on all mechanical methods for the sweeping of chimneys, as both prevented the free reign of more efficient and less harmful methods of work.¹⁶¹ Wilberforce chastised Roberts for bringing the two issues together which he felt threatened to undermine the horrors of slavery:

‘I highly approve of your perseverance in not giving up the cause of the poor climbing boys; though I am a little scandalised at your calling their case an evil not less grievous though less extensive than that of Negro slaves. This shows what I have often remarked, that even those who are the best informed on the subject of Negro Slavery, have frequently a very inadequate idea of its real enormity...’¹⁶²

Despite Wilberforce’s criticism, Roberts persisted in the comparison. Indeed, during the emancipation campaign, a poster entitled ‘RETRIBUTION’ was circulated in Sheffield which featured two emblems side-by-side: the familiar figure of the kneeling slave with the caption ‘Pity poor slave,’ and one of a kneeling chimney boy labelled ‘Pity poor sweep.’¹⁶³

It was through the equalisation campaign, however, that the abolitionists were led to discuss their relationship to domestic labour conditions. Firstly, Cropper depicted the

¹⁵⁹ *The Cambrian*, 9 April 1824.

¹⁶⁰ Drescher, ‘Cart Whip and Billy Roller,’ pp. 3-24.

¹⁶¹ *Sheffield Mercury*, 7 June 1828.

¹⁶² MSS Samuel Roberts letters: No. 47, Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 31 October 1827.

¹⁶³ Poster ‘Retribution.’ (Sheffield, no date).

protective duties as a tax on the population for the support of slavery.¹⁶⁴ This, he argued, was an expense the British people could barely afford and one which would be prolonged so long as the government felt slavery had to be bolstered against an open competition with free labour systems. While principally an appeal to the 'national interest,' Cropper also alerted others to the connections between the British labour and slave produce. His opposition to abstention was based on a fear that it would extend to the disuse of slave-grown cotton which underpinned the national economy: 'It has always appeared a difficult thing to me to go through the disuse of all slave produce, more especially cotton,' he wrote to Sturge:

'We have nearly one million of persons employed within this country in the manufacture of cotton, which is the produce of slave labour... There is a broad line of distinction between sugar and any thing else - it is the only article which receives a bounty, and nearly the only one on which the protecting duty has any effect - that on cotton I suspect will be wholly removed...'¹⁶⁵

Under trading restrictions, India could not provide sufficient raw cotton at the necessary price to maintain the expanding textile industry or its labouring population. Sudden disuse would consequently throw the manufacturing districts of Lancashire into chaos. These considerations led Cropper openly to advocate his plan for the relief of the distressed population of Ireland. Cropper came close to blurring the boundary between the conditions of domestic workers and British slaves:

'I am sure none of these civil, kind-hearted and generous-minded poor people would change their miserable condition for that of West Indian slavery; yet in food, clothing, and houses, many of them must be infinitely worse off than many of the Slaves; and being so, if I were an Irishman I would say, it is my first duty to raise these my poor neighbours to a greater state of comfort - but happy am I in believing, that the cause of the one, is the cause of the other...'¹⁶⁶

Significantly, the Anti-Slavery Society incorporated Cropper's remedy for the Irish situation into its appeals against bounties from the autumn of 1826.¹⁶⁷

It could be argued that Cropper's plan illustrates the displacement function merely at closer range. Ireland was not an integrated part of the British empire: Irish immigrants took the worst jobs in Liverpool and other ports much as black people disappeared

¹⁶⁴ This argument was repeated in the second issue of the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, July 1825.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from James Cropper to his wife, 7th November 1824, quoted in Anne Cropper, *Letters...*, p. 71.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 17, October 1826, p. 246.

into the anonymity of the urban masses. But Cropper's arguments provided the precedent for a limited discussion of domestic anxieties which emerged during the short depression of 1826. The first modern cyclical boom in British economic history was followed, in the autumn and winter of 1825, by a severe financial crisis which hastened the collapse of about 100 banks throughout the country. In the following year, the manufacturing districts were thrown into temporary distress, leading to a revival of Luddism in Lancashire.¹⁶⁸ In this context, the protective duties question was raised again and with a more potent appeal to manufacturers and labourers alike. In late-summer 1826, *The Times* printed an article which virtually paraphrased Cropper's works. The author argued that the duty on East Indian sugar and coffee was an unacceptable tax on the importation of raw materials and thus represented a tax on finished goods, especially those bound for India.

'Is it not absolute infatuation thus to shut against ourselves, to such an extent, the market of a hundred millions of consumers, who are also our fellow-subjects, in order to favour a handful of planters in our slave colonies, who have no claim upon us for such a costly sacrifice, except that it is required to repay to them the destruction of human life which slavery causes?'¹⁶⁹

In this way, the planters were depicted as the selfish interest who prevented any remedy of this paradoxical situation. This argument helped to typecast the West Indian in the role of the Tory reactionary which was consolidated when members of the West Indian lobby emerged as opponents of parliamentary reform.

The abolitionists absorbed and developed the line of argument pursued in *The Times*. The Anti-Slavery Society noted the article amid its own appeals for the repeal of the protective bounties. In the *Monthly Reporter*, the sugar duties were represented as a tax on the 'distressed manufactures' of England 'in such a way as to diminish their already too scanty employments!'¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth Heyrick, in her *Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences of British Women*, argued for the government removal of the sugar duties for this reason: 'by so doing they may confer incalculable benefits on the starving population of Ireland, and greatly improve the conditions of our own.'¹⁷¹ Cropper's belief in the universal power of free trade was clearly infectious: it was claimed in the *Reporter* that repeal would find employment for the country's

¹⁶⁸ Asa Briggs refers to the 1824-25 boom period as the first modern cyclical boom in *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867*, 2nd edn. (1979), pp. 211-212; Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State* (London and New York, 1983), p. 194; Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century - British Political and Social History, 1688-1832* (London, 1997), pp. 352-354.

¹⁶⁹ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 15, August 1826.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 17, October 1826, p. 246.

¹⁷¹ [Elizabeth Heyrick], *Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences of British Women* (Leicester, 1828).

labouring population, 'the miserable people of Ireland,' and usher in the 'enlightenment and civilisation' of India and Africa:

'If we continue to acquiesce in that system of bounties and protecting duties, and in those impolitic restrictions on our commerce, to which we have now adverted, we shall thereby greatly aggravate the distress of our countrymen at home; prevent at the same time the alleviation of the misery and oppression of hundred of thousands of our fellow subjects abroad; and instead of contributing to the general happiness and civilisation of mankind, as we have the power of doing beyond any nation under heaven, we shall, in fact, be found impeding the progress of both.'¹⁷²

The same concerns were represented in petitions. The Surrey Society's anti-slavery petition of 1826, which was held up to fellow abolitionists as 'a model of force and eloquence,' barely attacked the protective duties in terms of West Indian slavery but instead in the 'agricultural and manufacturing interests' of Britain.¹⁷³ Moreover, in the 1827 session, the connection to the distress of the labouring population was explicitly stated in petitions sent from those commercial districts with a vested interest in the equalisation of duties. The petition from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, signed by over 400 industrialists, argued that the protective duties had been largely responsible for 'the present state of extreme suffering and privation to which the labouring classes in this town and neighbourhood are subjected.'¹⁷⁴ It was in this way that the equalisation argument allowed abolitionists to present emancipation as an issue of direct economic relevance to the working-classes as well as to the nation.

We should not be surprised that the Anti-Slavery Society never openly avowed its intention to remedy all of Britain's social ills. The abolitionist movement was a lobby not a party and, though it stood for wide-ranging moral reforms, it was aware that extending its demands to a manifesto of pledges merely weakened the opportunity of success on individual issues. Abolitionists were philanthropists who were engaged in numerous, often separate circles of activities, as the Chairman at the general meeting of 1830 was keen to remind Henry Hunt. Slavery was seen as an unparalleled moral crime, one which was wholly repugnant to religion, humanity and justice. It was perceived to be an evil of far greater magnitude than the comparable domestic social ills which the abolitionists, through their arguments, drew attention to. It was for this reason that the Anti-Slavery Society favoured the cause of the slaves over that of British labourers in the 1820s. But we should not forget that the abolitionist tradition was well established by the 1820s while the movements for improving working

¹⁷² *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 17, October 1826, p. 246.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, No. 19, December 1826.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 22, March 1827.

conditions were still finding their feet. When Oastler and Hunt sought to advocate the principles of their cause, they were drawn to engage with the abolitionist movement partly because it could command massive popular nationwide support, often from those whom they hoped to rally. Thus, while there was a precedent for nationwide abolitionist agitation, there was no such channel for appealing against domestic labour conditions. Anti-slavery provided that example for later working-class activists.

Similarly, one must not forget that the domestic labour argument was most powerfully expressed by the West Indian lobby. In this context, it is unsurprising that the abolitionists did not absorb the appeals for a remedy of domestic social ills into their campaign against slavery. The way in which the subject was broached provides further evidence that the ideology, methods, and strategies of the Anti-Slavery society were formed through their conflict with the West Indian plantocracy. How could the abolitionists accept the validity of their opponents' arguments when they were used to delay indefinitely the business of amelioration? If historians wish to see a displacement function at work in the slavery question, they need look no further than the West Indian deployment of the wage slavery argument.

Consequently, we should perhaps be surprised that abolitionists at the local and national levels made so many direct references to the 'wage' slavery argument and that, in 1828, their appeals to Parliament drew direct connections between these two ills. Historians have been unable to find firm evidence to show that abolitionists, either as a group or as individuals, attacked slavery to divert attention away from domestic ills. There is, in contrast, a great deal of evidence to show that abolitionists not only took cognisance of the 'wage' slavery argument, but that they attempted to pursue the remedy of both ills simultaneously through their private actions and that their discussion of oppressed workers heightened an awareness of domestic distress. Abolitionist hostility to the wage slavery argument was by no means ubiquitous. Local supporters were as likely to condemn the use of the argument as they were implicitly to accept its validity or to openly espouse the cause of free labourers. Cropper's equalisation argument, through its discussion of social deprivation, highlighted the compatibility of the two causes and brought the abolitionists closer towards including the case of domestic workers in their arguments.

Chapter Nine

ABOLITIONIST MOBILISATION IN THE PROVINCES, 1824-29.

Just as the ideology of abolitionism in the 1820s has been neglected, so have the efforts of provincial abolitionists to sustain the movement received scant attention. Between November 1824 and October 1825, the London Society did not attempt to rouse the country 'out of delicacy to Ministers,'¹ but it did seek to consolidate abolitionist efforts at the grass-roots level. From 1824, the London Society focused on creating permanent committees to aid them in distributing tracts, raising subscriptions and petitioning when necessary. In this chapter we will look at the ways in which local committees were encouraged and why they continued to grow in number in the 1820s despite a relative malaise at the centre. We will also look at the mechanics of local mobilisation - how abolitionists produced and distributed pamphlets and the means employed to raise subscriptions - as a precursor to a discussion of the social extension of the anti-slavery public in chapter ten.²

FORMING COMMITTEES

By the end of the 1824 petition campaign, the abolitionists had realised that their struggle was to be long and hard-fought. But they were also aware of the extent to which the slave question had been revived. The London Committee estimated that they had 230 correspondents across the country, with about 800 towns in connection to them.³ Realising the need to consolidate and maintain support, the abolitionist leaders turned their minds to the formation of *permanent* committees to provide a network for the distribution of information, just as they had in 1788. The Society also needed to put local committees on a more permanent footing if they were to raise

¹ MSS Thomas Clarkson, 'Diary of a Tour for the Anti-Slavery Society, 1823-1824,' National Library of Wales, MS 17984 A (hereafter cited as MSS 'Clarkson's diary'): 2 October 1824.

² The mechanics of petitioning has already been discussed and so will not feature in the chapter: The mobilisations of 1825-26 and 1828, while smaller, were more significant in terms of religious mobilisation and thus shall be discussed in the following chapter.

³ This assessment would appear to be reasonable as 777 petitions had been presented to the Commons in the previous two sessions. In total, 755 places petitioned in the campaigns of 1823-24. 138 petitioned in both years. MSS 'Minute Books of the Committee on Slavery', Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Brit. Emp S20 E2/1-5, 5 vols. (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society'), E2/1: 20 June 1824.

funds for future action. The business of the Committee had been financially exhausting and an appeal was soon made for donations and subscriptions.⁴

At the beginning of June 1824, the London Anti-Slavery Society accepted Clarkson's offer of a second tour during which he intended to mobilise Wales. The London Committee had already organised anti-slavery in Scotland through the Glasgow and Edinburgh societies, and they had pressed for the formation of a committee in Dublin since the spring.⁵ Although Gwynne Owen suggests that 'the Anti-Slavery Society in London did little to organise those Welshmen who were sympathetic to the cause into effective anti-slavery committees,' it would appear that Clarkson's tour was intended to bring about this precise result.⁶ As we have seen, there existed a strain of abolitionism in Wales by the early 1820s. Twenty-one petitions were received by the Commons from Wales in 1792 and twenty-eight in 1814.⁷ In 1823, Joseph Price, the Quaker industrialist of Neath Abbey near Swansea, offered to organise support in South Wales. A few months after, Clarkson arranged for the Chester Committee to undertake responsibility for twenty-two towns across North Wales.⁸ Later they provided Clarkson with introductory letters to prominent individuals across North Wales.⁹ The London Society had also arranged for some tracts to be translated into Welsh.¹⁰ Nevertheless, despite these attempts to mobilise support in North and South Wales, only five petitions were received by the Commons from Welsh towns or villages in 1824, one less than in 1823.

The abolitionists had a hard task facing them in Wales where abolitionism was underdeveloped. Owen suggests that non-conformist ministers were apathetic to political campaigning or petitioning in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, the Welsh-language periodical press which fuelled non-conformist radicalism developed slowly and considerably later than their English counterparts.¹¹ Wales had a low level

⁴ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 27 July 1824. The Quakers were also contacted directly for financial support.

⁵ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 10 February 1824.

⁶ Gwynne E. Owen, 'Welsh anti-slavery sentiments, 1790-1865: a survey of public opinion' MA thesis, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (1964), p. 31. The precise purpose of Clarkson's tour is unknown but it is reasonable to assume that rallying the Welsh was Clarkson's intention. On 31 August 1824, £20 was sent to Clarkson at Liverpool with instructions 'to use his own discretion and pleasure in expediting his tour.' So far, his tour had only covered towns in Wales and on the border. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 31 August 1824.

⁷ Gwynne E. Owen, 'Welsh anti-slavery sentiment...' Appendix A.

⁸ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 9 September 1823. The Chester Society resolved to translate Clarkson's *Brief View* into Welsh for that purpose.

⁹ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 10 August 1824.

¹⁰ Owen, *op.cit.*, p. 55. Hanbury sent a translated copy of one of the society's circular letters to *Y Gwylledydd* for publication in the following year.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-35.

of literacy and the language barrier presented persistent problems. At Llandowry, Clarkson was told that 'few in the County can read or speak English.'¹² Furthermore, Wales presented problems geographically. The distribution of pamphlets, tracts and *Monthly Reporters* was hindered by poor transport. Clarkson spent much time arranging carriage for regular parcels.¹³ Wales' small, rural population could barely be tapped: Clarkson was asked by the London Committee to confine his tour to large towns where there were sufficient people to organise a respectable petition.¹⁴ As Ellen Wilson has observed, Clarkson found 'a division between the large trading towns, keen to agitate, and rural strongholds with a strong inclination to wait and see what the government would do.'¹⁵ In Wales, this same difference existed between north and south. Clarkson found warm sympathisers in Newport, Cardiff and Swansea where committees were formed at his request - the Swansea and Neath Society declared its permanency.¹⁶ In the north, however, supporters were far less forthcoming.

Clarkson's principal aim was to create committees which would act as nodes for anti-slavery activity, especially petitioning. Where supporters already existed, Clarkson had little problem prompting activity. Individuals in those places which had previously petitioned, such as Swansea and Aberystwyth, readily offered their services. Nevertheless, much of this local support had never advanced so far as to require a formal committee. Rev. William Clive of Welshpool had canvassed the local inhabitants and distributed pamphlets in previous years and did not see the need for a committee.¹⁷ However, most of Wales, and especially the rural north, had remained quiet in previous years. In these cases, Clarkson sought out the most prominent individuals and hoped that they were sympathetic to the cause. If not, it was crucial to discourage them from opposition. The warden at Ruthin was considered so important 'that a meeting would be hardly sanctioned without him.'¹⁸ In Cardigan, Clarkson had to press Major Bowen until he reluctantly committed himself to the cause before the magistrate and principal inhabitants would give their support or even an opinion on the issue. The town, like many places he visited, was 'kept in subordination and

¹² MSS Clarkson's Diary: 20 July 1824 and 21 July 1824. Few pamphlets were sent to Cardigan for this reason.

¹³ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 9 July 1824, 2 August 1824, 6 August 1824. Tracts for the Aberystwyth committee were to be transported first by the Birmingham canal and then by coach from Shrewsbury. Similar arrangements were made to transport parcels to Rev. Clive at Welshpool. A member of the Cardiff committee owned a coach which ran daily and offered to convey parcels to Cardiff without expense.

¹⁴ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 15 June 1824.

¹⁵ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson - A Biography*, 2nd edn. (York, 1996), p. 242, *fn.* 49.

¹⁶ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 9 July 1824 to 12 July 1824.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 6 August 1824.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13 August 1824.

Ignorance.’¹⁹ As abolitionists were often busy and prominent individuals, Clarkson hoped that they could meet him during his brief visits. At Ruthin, the Shrewsbury assizes had drawn away most likely recruits while at Carmarthen his visit clashed with the Quarter Sessions.²⁰

Clarkson already knew from his English tours that courting these prominent figures was the key to success. In Wales, where local life was monopolised by the overpowering influence of great landlords, this was especially true.²¹ If the patronage of local nobles could be secured, the cause would succeed locally. At a meeting for the formation of the Newport Committee, he was pleased that ‘Thomas Prothero Esq., the man of by far the most Influence in the Town was present, and gave his Support to all our Proceedings.’²² At Carmarthen he dined with the Bishop of St. David’s who provided him with letters of introduction to several members of the clergy, which included an appeal for their assistance in the cause. It was as a result of one letter from the Bishop that the vicar of Llandowry ‘got together in half an Hour seven other Respectable Inhabitants of the Town and Vicinity.’²³ Clarkson also spoke to Rev. John Elias, ‘the great Preacher of the Methodists in Wales,’ whom he knew could ‘command many thousand People in any good Cause.’²⁴ On rare occasions, Clarkson succeeded against powerful local hostility but typically his was an uphill struggle.²⁵

The peculiarities of the Welsh case further revealed themselves in the rivalries between Churchmen and dissenters and between Whigs and Tories which were greatly aggravated. The lack of pre-existing philanthropic or religious societies in Wales prevented Clarkson from drawing on networks of affiliation or committees engaged in charitable work. The formation of an anti-slavery committee was ‘a prodigious victory at Brecon... When a meeting was first called for a Bible Society, only six persons attended.’²⁶ At Ruthin, where such a society had existed, Clarkson could only muster three or four supporters.²⁷ However, even among religious and philanthropic friends, Clarkson found ‘sad prejudices’ entertained against Rev. Smith who was believed to have caused the Demerara insurrection. This opinion was so strong among the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20 July 1824.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13 August 1824, 15 July 1824.

²¹ Owen, *op. cit.*, chapters 1 and 2, *passim*.

²² MSS Clarkson’s Diary: 9 July 1824.

²³ *Ibid.*, 15 July 1824, 21 July 1824.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28 August 1824.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16 August 1824. A respectable committee was formed at Bala though the town was gripped ‘in the Teeth of Sir. Robt. Vaughan,’ a hostile landlord.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 July 1824.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14 August 1824. The beleaguered ‘private’ committee was headed by Mr. E. Jones, a solicitor, who had been prominent in the Bible Society.

committees in Bangor and Caernarfon that no papers containing a defence of Smith were to be sent there.²⁸ On Anglesey, the ministers and members of the Holywell Bible Society were also helpful but misinformed: 'Here I found great ignorance of the Subject, great Misconceptions of our Views, and the same Ultra Government feeling, which seems to have characterised North Wales.'²⁹ This situation presented problems for Clarkson who regarded a sense of 'religious duty' as an important factor in the assessment of a sympathiser's sincerity or earnestness.³⁰

Non-conformist ministers appear to have volunteered their services but few 'mixed' committees appear to have been formed in Wales. The Newtown committee, which consisted of an Anglican clergyman, two ministers of the Independent and Baptist congregations, and the tutor of the local Independent Academy, was an exception to the general rule.³¹ Generally speaking, religious prejudice was a great hindrance to Clarkson. Owen has singled out Wrexham as a prime case for the problems of mobilising antipathetic religious groups.³² At Llanwechel, Clarkson discovered that 'no churchman has Parlane with a Methodist here,' and elsewhere he found that dissenters were despised.³³ This prejudice, as in many areas across Britain, was not based solely on doctrinal differences '*but because they were the Lowest of the People. - Their Preachers too were very low men...*'³⁴ Indeed, the Welsh experience confirms that the 'lowliness' of some sympathisers prevented the involvement of men of influence. At Caernarfon, Clarkson found great enthusiasm among the tradesmen but less among the more influential landowners: 'the Gentlemen of the Town would not follow a Committee of respectable Tradesmen, yet the Respectable Tradesmen would, *in a good work*, follow the Committee of Gentlemen.'³⁵

Clarkson quickly found that North Wales was overwhelmingly held by Tories and Anglicans and made little progress. Here, the 1823 resolutions proved to be an intractable problem. Those who held power locally were far more inclined to accept the government's pledge than to agree to reviving agitation. Sympathisers in North Wales were overwhelmingly in favour of waiting for more news from the colonies

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23 August 1824.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 August 1824.

³⁰ See Clarkson's comment on Rev. Bruce. MSS Clarkson's Diary: 10 July 1824.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4 August 1824.

³² Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

³³ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 24 August 1824, 14 August 1824. 'Nothing would do but what came from the Church. I must be *exceeding cautious*, how I suffered dissenters to originate any thing.'

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 14 August 1824.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 August 1824.

before petitioning Parliament.³⁶ In mid- and South Wales, where Tory dominance was powerful but less overwhelming, Clarkson found that he was again nevertheless forced to ensure that a balance was maintained between Whigs and Tories. In some areas, auxiliaries could 'cause the Town to be divided into two Parties.'³⁷ But he again found the question of 1823 plaguing his actions: the Mayor of Cardigan felt that the Society's pamphlets could 'excite the feelings of the public too much, & make them think that Government did not move fast enough in such a Cause, & make them disaffected.'³⁸ Clearly agitated, Clarkson angrily noted in his diary that 'there is an Evident Indisposition to meddle farther in the Matter, and to wait to see what Government does. - Welch [*sic*] loyal and obstinate.'³⁹ He was told by one local abolitionist that the people of Denbighshire, Merionethshire and all the country surrounding them 'the *People were half a Century* behind those of *South Wales*, and a *Century behind those of England*.'⁴⁰

In total, Clarkson appears to have promoted the creation of seventeen committees, secured the permanency of two more, and arranged for the distribution of propaganda in five other towns which were less sympathetic to the cause. As a result, abolitionism in Wales was less consistently organised than in the rest of Britain. Anti-slavery in Ruthin, for instance, was organised by a 'private committee' which consisted of a few enthusiastic supporters who worked cautiously in the face of local opposition.⁴¹ In other areas, especially along the south coast, responsibility for the cause was shared between committees in the principal towns and many bodies shared activists. Welsh societies, being more modest and canvassing a smaller population, appear to have benefited from the activities of a few abolitionists far more than English societies. The Haverfordwest Committee included two members of the neighbouring Milford Committee.⁴² Joseph Price and his son-in-law, Rev. Elijah Waring, were involved in all three of the large committees in South Wales.⁴³ This phenomenon was repeated across Britain in the post-1824 period as smaller towns and villages, which had been canvassed by abolitionists in larger towns, organised their own committees and increasingly dealt with London directly. The Cowbridge committee, for instance,

³⁶ At Welshpool, Mold, and Denbigh local sympathisers agreed to petition only 'if the conduct of the West Indian legislatures was refractory.' MSS Clarkson's Diary, 2 August 1824, 12 August 1824, 13 August 1824.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 August 1824.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 July 1824.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13 August 1824.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 August 1824. This comment is usually credited to Clarkson, but he was reporting the words of Mr. E. Jones of Ruthin. See Ellen Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson*, p. 242, *fn* 49; Gwynne E. Owen, 'Welsh anti-slavery sentiment,' p. 38.

⁴¹ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 14 August 1824.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 17 July 1824.

⁴³ Owen, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

devolved from the Cardiff society to undertake its own organisation.⁴⁴ These societies still drew on the efforts of neighbouring abolitionists who were more experienced or zealous in the cause.

As Clarkson noted, 'the strength of a parent Society in London consisted in the number of its auxiliary Branches in the Country.'⁴⁵ But committees were temporary bodies, organised to oversee the raising of petitions and their transmission to Parliament. From September to November 1824, Clarkson devoted his time to converting local temporary committees into permanent branch societies. At Chester, the local committee became permanent on the eve of its dissolution.⁴⁶ Manchester, Darlington and Bristol also became auxiliary societies during his tour. Both the Sunderland and Durham committees, which had been organised through the Newcastle-upon-Tyne society, requested to be treated as 'independent' bodies and to deal with the London Society directly.⁴⁷ Many committees were large and well attended and could take on more responsibilities.⁴⁸ The new Halifax committee, which Clarkson regarded as a model for others, took under their care all the twenty-three townships of Halifax, which contained an estimated population of over 93,000 people.⁴⁹ It is reasonable to suppose, as the Leeds Society suggested, that smaller committees became independent as 'it would be more interesting... for them to keep up a correspondence with the London Committee' rather than maintain contact with a local branch society.⁵⁰

The abolitionist cause spread across a wider geographical area as committees and auxiliary societies proliferated from established centres of anti-slavery activism. As a result of this natural evolution at the grass-roots, societies in the 1820s were in more frequent contact with neighbouring societies. Several new committees maintained close connections with their old 'parent' committees: both the Durham and Newcastle groups shared officers who belonged to the Quaker Richardson family and the North Shields auxiliary included three members of the South Shields committee.⁵¹ There is also evidence that abolitionists who moved to new areas remained committed to the cause: Thomas Hodgson, who had obtained petitions from Appleby, later organised a

⁴⁴ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 10 July 1824.

⁴⁵ MSS Thomas Clarkson Papers, Huntingdon Library, California. Thomas Clarkson, 'The Account of Efforts, 1807-1824,' C. N. 33., p. 111. I am indebted to Professor Walvin for allowing me to look at his notes for this source.

⁴⁶ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 10 August 1824.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 20 - 22 September 1824.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 September 1824

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 October 1824, 4 October 1824.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 October 1824.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 18 September 1824.

committee at Lancaster.⁵² As a result of the proliferation of societies, the country was once more divided up into catchment areas. Existing connections between abolitionists made this straightforward. New committees readily offered their services in canvassing the surrounding countryside and suggested that other committees be formed in places where they had personal contacts so as to cover more ground.⁵³ The organisation of North Yorkshire was subsequently divided between the Quaker-dominated committees at York, Darlington and Richmond.⁵⁴

By the end of 1824, provincial sympathisers could organise relatively complicated matters between themselves. The formation of the Preston Society is a case in point. At the beginning of September, Clarkson stayed in Manchester with the Quaker Thomas Crewdson. The Manchester Committee had helped Cropper's Liverpool Society to organise the campaign across North Cheshire and throughout Lancashire, but a committee had not been formed in Preston to serve the central-northern district of this area. From Manchester, Clarkson travelled to Kendal and stayed with Crewdson's cousin, William Dilworth Crewdson, whom he recruited to aid him in the creation of a committee at Preston. Dilworth Crewdson suggested that Rev. Roger Wilson, Rector of Preston, would be likely to assist: Wilson was the son of Carver Wilson, a Westmoreland MP with whom Crewdson had dealings.⁵⁵ In Halifax, Clarkson found an active and well organised committee under the chairmanship of Caleb Howarth who agreed to press the necessity of a committee at Preston to his friends in that town and his relatives at Burnley. Clarkson contacted Dilworth Crewdson and the Manchester Committee, 'that they may send a Deputation over to Preston,' and noted that 'if all unite, we shall properly gain a Committee at Preston.'⁵⁶ Their efforts were successful: Preston petitioned on the next available occasion (in 1826) and in the late 1820s the Liverpool Society sent copies of abolitionist tracts to the local committee's secretary, Robert Benson, Cropper's former business partner. Though Clarkson was a guiding force, the Preston example suggests the importance of commercial, familial and friendship networks in the development of co-operative action.

Clarkson's tour also allowed him to reorganise any committees which had proved ineffective. In Ambleside, where Clarkson had arranged for William Wordsworth to

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13 September 1824; MSS Cropper Papers, Merseyside Maritime Museum Archive, Albert Dock, Liverpool. D/CR/12: list of James Cropper's correspondents, c. 1828.

⁵³ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 13 September 1824. See the example of the Appleby committee and Lancaster.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 September 1824, 28 September 1824.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 September 1824.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4 October 1824.

distribute tracts, nothing had been heard and so a new correspondent was chosen.⁵⁷ Clarkson heard from Samuel Lloyd reported that the latter's uncle, Charles, had failed to obtain petitions from twelve towns under his care. Clarkson recorded Samuel's comments:

‘the way to get our Affairs well-managed in the Birmingham Committee would be to ask his Uncle to decline in favour of his two Sons in Law, P. M. James and James Pearson... both clever men. Men who could convey all Birmingham with them. Men capable of speaking and speaking well in public, and men, who would like to take a public and prominent Part in the Management of the Committee. They are men too, who are both attached to the Cause. If I were to write to C. Lloyd, he would be sure to show my Letter to them, for they are his grand Counsellors, and the Change could be easily effected & then all would go on well.’⁵⁸

Clarkson also spent some time organising new committees. The Sheffield Society was unaware of its duties and responsibilities and had neglected to elect either a secretary or a treasurer.⁵⁹ Indeed, lack of information on this subject, and on the cause in general, left provincial abolitionists often unclear as to their purpose. This was not a new problem but now became a more pressing one.⁶⁰ In October 1824, Clarkson recorded that ‘the different Committees *neither know the State of the Question nor what to do.*’ Therefore he suggested that the London Society write a circular address encouraging local societies to meet every two months for the receipt of publications and their distribution as a means of keeping the cause alive. More importantly, he urged the London abolitionists to send ‘a short letter every two months to the Committees and Correspondents throughout the Kingdom.’⁶¹ The resulting publication, the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, became an important means of keeping abolitionists regularly active.

In February 1825, the London Committee continued consolidating by issuing a pamphlet entitled *Rules for the Formation of Committees*. At the second general meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society in April 1825, they appealed again for the formation of local auxiliaries. The number of anti-slavery associations soon rose. For the first time, ladies' anti-slavery associations were formed: the first was organised in West Bromwich a few days after the London Society made its appeal. This group, the Ladies Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves (later, and hereafter, the Female Society

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 August 1823.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 17 September 1824.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 October 1824, 18 October 1824.

⁶⁰ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 2 December 1823. The secretary of the Bath Anti-Slavery Committee wrote to London 'desiring instructions for their proceedings.'

⁶¹ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 2 October 1824.

for Birmingham), rapidly became a parallel centre of abolitionist organisation. The Female Society organised a network of district treasurers, one as far away as York, which provided the framework for the creation of local committees which communicated directly with Birmingham and not London. Within one year, there were thirty-eight ladies societies which rose to a peak of 117 in 1831.⁶² The London Society quickly took cognisance of this new force in popular abolitionism. In June 1825, the London Committee released its first strictures on the formation of separate male and female auxiliaries and 2,000 copies were ordered.⁶³ By September 1825, there were approximately 260 local societies (male and female) in different parts of the kingdom.⁶⁴

In October, James Cropper 'launched a brave campaign' to organise abolitionist support in the Midlands.⁶⁵ 'The larger towns, and especially where the leading people are intelligent, are the great points.'⁶⁶ He informed the London Committee of his plan to tour provincial societies but did not travel with their official sanction. Indeed, Davis suggests that some members of the London Society were hostile to the use of 'itinerant agents.' These men must have cringed at Cropper's decision to address a meeting at St. Peter's Field, Manchester, in January 1826, site of the infamous Peterloo Massacre eight years earlier.⁶⁷ In fact, Cropper had also entertained doubts about the efficacy of his plan but the response from audiences quickly eased his caution. A little over a month into his tour, he wrote to his coadjutor Joseph Sturge to suggest that 'we have nothing to fear from bringing our cause before the public.'⁶⁸

Cropper began his tour in the Midlands with the help of Joseph Sturge and soon received many requests to address public and private meetings. Lucy Townshend asked Cropper to address a large meeting at West Bromwich before 1,000 people in a dissenting meeting house. Cropper later spoke to a select group of Quaker women in Liverpool, which no doubt included his own active wife and daughter, who also

⁶² See Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery - The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (1992), pp. 43-51. The work of ladies associations is discussed throughout with that of men's groups in an attempt to treat both as branch societies. No distinction is made unless the gendered division is especially important, for example in the type of propaganda produced.

⁶³ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 8 June 1825, 15 June 1825, 29 June 1825. Note the use of the words 'societies' for male groups and 'associations' for females. This appears to have been a relatively consistent segregation in the Society's minute books and to a lesser extent among auxiliary societies of both sexes.

⁶⁴ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 30 April 1825, 21 September 1825.

⁶⁵ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1824-33,' pp. 161-162 covers Cropper's tour.

⁶⁶ Anne Cropper (ed.) *Extract of Letters from the late James Cropper* (1850): Letter from James Cropper to Joseph Sturge, 14 October 1825.

⁶⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 27 January 1826. Contains details of Cropper's meeting at Manchester.

⁶⁸ Anne Cropper (ed.), *Letters: James Cropper to Joseph Sturge*, 14 October 1825 and 30 November 1825; Davis, 'James Cropper, 1824-33,' pp. 161-162.

desired 'the opportunity of hearing.'⁶⁹ A Somerset abolitionist arranged for Cropper to attend a county meeting for the purpose of petitioning.⁷⁰ Local support flourished and Cropper hoped that it would continue to do so. Before he left for Birmingham, he wrote a short pamphlet 'to furnish a sort of key to the subject, for those who had expressed their willingness to take an active part in spreading a knowledge of these views... The work is truly great and I trust the labourers will increase.'⁷¹ The number of supporters certainly did increase: Cropper came to rely on other abolitionists while he was in the country.⁷²

The arguments which Cropper put forward were not the typical anthology of abolitionists points but a reiteration of the case for the equalisation of the sugar duties. The surviving reports of these meetings show how Cropper barely concealed his economic critique behind moral rhetoric.⁷³ When the highly-active Derby Society published the substance of Cropper's address at their public meeting, it was under the title *Slave Labour and Free Labour*.⁷⁴ Cropper appears to have been concerned that his arguments were perhaps too complicated for some audiences, especially women. At his West Bromwich meeting, Cropper was doubtful that the ladies there present 'could enter into, or understand my views on the subject,' and hoped that he could 'make it familiar to them.' On this occasion, he adopted Sturge's suggestion of meeting the most intelligent and active members of the society first to test their understanding before speaking to a large public meeting.⁷⁵

Cropper's tour bridged an important moment in the cause. From December 1825, the London Society encouraged new petitions and adopted a more confrontational stance against Canning. The third annual meeting called for expression of public dismay at the government's lack of progress on the issue. In fact, Buxton later called on the government to interfere in the colonial legislatures or to withdraw its pledge of support for gradual emancipation.⁷⁶ At the meeting, Cropper seconded a resolution

⁶⁹ Anne Cropper (ed.), *Letters*: 14 October 1825, 12 December 1825.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 November 1825, 12 December 1825. Daniel Sykes in Hull invited Cropper to address the local East-Riding Auxiliary Society.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14 October 1825.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 12 December 1825.

⁷³ The report of Cropper's speech at a meeting in Wolverhampton noted that he focused on the role of free labour produce in destroying slavery amid general comments on the injustice and inhumanity of the institution itself. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 28 January 1826.

⁷⁴ Derby Anti-Slavery Society, *Slave Labour and Free Labour: The Substance of Mr. Cropper's Address on Wednesday, November 22nd, at the Respectable Meeting, King's Head, Derby* (Derby, 1825).

⁷⁵ Anne Cropper (ed.), *Letters*: 14 October 1825.

⁷⁶ W. L. Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition* (1928), p. 165.

which condemned the bounties and proposed compensation.⁷⁷ He wrote to Sturge from London: 'Thou wilt have seen by the papers that the resolutions and petition are very decisive in the Bounty and Protections quarter. It is very important that these parts of the subject should be taken up every where it is possible.' Cropper may have been one of the prime movers in the decision to renew petitions to Parliament: both Hull and Derby had been urged to petition at a very early stage by Cropper during his tour.⁷⁸ Indeed, the third meeting stated that 'it would be ingratitude in this connexion to withhold out warm acknowledgements of the great services which have been rendered to our common cause, since we last met, by the able, zealous, indefatigable, and successful efforts of Mr. Cropper of Liverpool.'⁷⁹ Cropper's influence was clearly felt in the 1826 petitions although not all the petitions attacked the protective duties as the London Society later lamented.⁸⁰ In February 1826, the Doncaster meeting condemned the bounties and protecting duties as 'a tax upon the People of this Country' and suggested that the money they paid in duties could be used instead as compensation to ensure the 'ultimate abolition' of slavery, as had been suggested at the third meeting.⁸¹ At Leeds, where Cropper had addressed 'a rather select meeting' a month earlier, abstention was hotly debated for some hours until the motion for the adoption of the sugar boycott was withdrawn.⁸²

As a result of Clarkson and Cropper's efforts, the tour and the lecture were revived as features of anti-slavery culture in the 1820s. By the winter of 1825-26, some places such as Manchester, Hull, Bristol and Kendal had received a visit from a member of the London Committee each year for the last three years. Each time, the cause was revitalised in a different way, either prompting petitions, the formation of permanent societies or the discussion of wider aspects of the campaign. Touring also became an aspect of provincial abolitionist activity as a result. Daniel Sykes, the Hull abolitionist and an East Yorkshire MP, embarked upon a tour of the East Riding in autumn 1830, organising petitions and speaking at impromptu public meetings at Bridlington, Hornsea and Driffield.⁸³ Sykes was a keen advocate of equalisation and had publicly eulogised Cropper's efforts at the Anti-Slavery Society's second annual meeting.⁸⁴ In 1828, one abolitionist made a tour of Yorkshire and Northamptonshire to diffuse information and promote female anti-slavery associations.⁸⁵ Others gave lectures in

⁷⁷ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 7 (December 1825) and No. 8 (January 1826).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 7 (December 1825).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 14 (July 1826).

⁸¹ *Doncaster, Nottingham and Lincolnshire Gazette*, 10 February 1826.

⁸² *Leeds Mercury*, 28 January 1826.

⁸³ *Hull Advertiser*, 3 September 1830.

⁸⁴ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1823-33,' p. 161.

⁸⁵ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 2 September 1828.

the provinces: R. M. Beverley, a prominent gradualist in the East Riding, spoke at a public meeting in Sheffield.⁸⁶ Rev. Benjamin Godwin spoke at public meetings in Bradford, York and Scarborough. His addresses were subsequently highlighted to itinerant speakers employed by the Agency Committee as examples of successful endeavours.⁸⁷

Such were the efforts made to organise local abolitionism but what did these societies do and how were they organised? The 'suggested regulations for forming an anti-slavery society,' of which 3,500 in various forms were in circulation by the summer of 1825, consisted of a form with blank spaces for the insertion of the name of the town or neighbourhood in the title of a society 'for mitigating and gradually abolishing' slavery. Committees could consist of either twelve, eighteen or twenty-four members, and the quorum was fixed at three or five members according to the number of the committee. The London Society also encouraged annual meetings, quarterly statements of accounts, and the enlisting of banks to receive subscriptions. The organisational structure of men's and women's societies was virtually identical: both appointed presidents, vice-presidents, treasurers, secretaries and a committee of governors and both were subject to the same rules on quorum and committee size. The London Committee also saw the principal duty of local committees as being the distribution of tracts and the collection of subscriptions to defray local and national expense.

As Midgley suggests the issuing of rules indicates an attempt by the Anti-Slavery Society 'to encourage some unity of aims, structure and activities among local groups.'⁸⁸ But the duties suggested to male and female societies differed slightly. Both male and female societies were encouraged to disseminate accurate information through pamphlets, but the attention of men's societies was also drawn to the use of the 'public papers and periodical publications.' Men were also asked 'to reply to, and correct, erroneous statements and misrepresentations' made in the public sphere. Women were not directed to the use of newspapers and public meetings in their suggested rules.⁸⁹ Indeed, women's groups were not encouraged to use either the press or large meetings but were instead asked to diffuse information and collect

⁸⁶ R. M. Beverley, *A Speech on the Negro Apprenticeship delivered in the Cutler's Hall, Sheffield, on a Monday evening, February 12, 1838, by R. M. Beverley* (1838).

⁸⁷ Rev. Benjamin Godwin, *The substance of a course of lectures on British Colonial Slavery, delivered at Bradford, York, and Scarborough* (1830); Agency Committee, 'Letter of Instructions' reprinted in Sir George Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections* (1854), p. 139 and E. Hurwitz, *Politics and the Public Conscience* (1973), pp. 128-131.

⁸⁸ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 48.

⁸⁹ [Anti-Slavery Society], 'Rules for the Formation of Anti-Slavery Associations' (n.d.).

subscriptions through a network of district treasurers. Where it was assumed that men's groups would be formed either as a consequence of public meetings or a well attended gathering, a note in the rules for ladies' associations stated that a first meeting 'can be held in a private room and an Association made up of a few members which can later be enlarged.'⁹⁰ Ladies' societies were assumed to be both smaller and less public in their origins and activity. Instead, more direct and personal contact with grass-roots support was encouraged: a printed note in the margin asked ladies to lend their pamphlets, collect them, and lend them again to someone else rather than to give them away. Most importantly, only men's societies were asked to raise petitions.

It is important to recognise that these regulations were 'submitted for the consideration' of provincial abolitionists and did not constitute formal requirements. The London Society made it clear that 'they may be altered and modified, and the blanks may be filled up according to circumstances.' The extent to which the form of regulations was used or modified for use is unknown. However, the issue of the names of societies is an interesting one. Midgley has noted how 'anti-slavery society' and 'auxiliary,' while sex-neutral, actually denoted male activity. As a result, early women's societies defined themselves by adopting gendered titles, for example, Lucy Townshend's West Bromwich group was initially called the 'Ladies Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves.'⁹¹ Other specifically ladies societies followed, although they probably drew more on the West Bromwich society's example than actually responding to the regulations supplied by London.⁹² However, it is also possible that women's societies disagreed with the London Society's policy of 'mitigating and gradually abolishing' slavery. As we have seen, immediatism was a powerful force within female abolitionism. Moreover, women's societies were rallied to action by repeated appeals from Heyrick in the late 1820s. New societies such as the Sheffield Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves, which advocated immediatism from its formation, may have adopted different names often without abolition in the title, to avoid disagreements with the London leadership.

These regulations were principally devised to maintain the momentum of abolitionist activity at the grass-roots level. In both spirit and letter, they gave provincial sympathisers the latitude to organise their own efforts as they saw fit. It is this activity which we will turn to now.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

⁹² Midgley discusses the importance of Birmingham's example, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

The London Society’s rules for both male and female societies stated that the diffusion of accurate information was the first work of local abolitionists. Committees were encouraged to purchase and distribute the London Society’s official publications. The volume of tracts which were printed by the Anti-Slavery Society during the emancipation campaign is truly remarkable: Walvin calculates that between 1823 and 1831 the London Society printed in excess of 2.8 million tracts and that no other contemporary political movement could approximate this figure.⁹³ The mass production and rapid distribution of these tracts was made possible by technical developments within the publishing field and the rapid extension of a print culture throughout Great Britain. The increased mechanisation of paper-making and printing made large print runs of pamphlets a reality from the 1820s. Similarly, the expanding network of provincial booksellers enabled tracts to be distributed quickly and widely.⁹⁴ More importantly, the printing trade also expanded, bringing more and more towns into the publishing age and providing the means for the growth and development of provincial newspapers. Provincial abolitionists could re-print the London Society pamphlets and publish tracts by local writers. In fact, the dissemination of vast quantities of cheap literature became ‘a powerful feature of the culture of antislavery.’⁹⁵

The production and distribution of abolitionist tracts created and maintained the momentum of local activity. In October 1824, Clarkson advised the London Committee to send a ‘short letter’ every two months to the auxiliary societies for precisely this purpose:

‘Such a Report would enliven the Committees & the Committees meeting every two months would keep *the Cause* alive... nothing would do it more innocently and more completely, than a Report every two Months to be sent down to the Country Committees with Intelligence &c. and Exhortations to the Country Committees to meet every two Months to receive it and talk about it.’⁹⁶

⁹³ James Walvin, ‘The Propaganda of Anti-Slavery,’ in Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846* (1982), p. 60.

⁹⁴ David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991), p. 50; J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery, 1787-1807* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 10-13.

⁹⁵ Turley, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

⁹⁶ MSS Clarkson’s Diary: 2 October 1824.

As has been noted, Clarkson's suggestion led eventually to the creation of the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, the London Society's only regular journal and the vanguard of abolitionist attempts to stimulate a mass campaign.⁹⁷ The first issue, released at the end of June 1825, represented a bold plan to educate the 'numerous and influential classes of the community' in the slavery question and to recruit them to the cause. The abolitionists sought an extremely wide readership: the 'friends of Negro improvement' were asked to lend their copies or encourage further purchases through local auxiliaries. The price was also extremely low: at four shillings for one hundred copies, the first issue could be purchased from a local society for half-pence, half the price of the *Poor Man's Guardian* seven years later. The London Society also advised that postage costs could be kept to a minimum if the issues were put in with other booksellers' orders 'or along with the Monthly Publications of the various religious or charitable societies.'⁹⁸ Thus, the importance of the expanding network of print-culture becomes immediately apparent.

The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter rapidly became the London Society's principal publication. The accounts of the society show that 1,766,100 copies of the *Reporter* were printed in the period 1825-31 constituting two-thirds, of the total number of tracts produced. The print-run of individual issues never fell below twelve thousand copies while in the months of heavy campaigning, especially those in 1826 and 1828, twenty thousand copies were regularly printed. In June 1831, the print run peaked at 66,750 copies.⁹⁹ The trade in *Reporters* thus constituted a vast proportion of the London society's output. Local societies also purchased and spread the London Society's other publications. In 1826, when the London Society first distinguished between donations and proceeds from publications in their accounts, two-thirds of those societies which contributed to the national funds sent proceeds from publications. Half of these associations also sent additional contributions. Many societies remained extremely active in the distribution of official publications throughout the next five years: the auxiliary societies in Liskeard (for all East Cornwall), Norwich and Norfolk, Liverpool, Worcester, Manchester, Gainsborough and Leeds were notably active. Ladies societies, however, provided the greatest proceeds from publications: in 1828 the Birmingham Female Society sent £90, Calne and Salisbury sent £70, and the Liverpool Ladies Association sent £86 to the London

⁹⁷ In December 1824, the publication of 'a monthly sheet for the information of friends in the Country' was first considered by the London Committee but it was not until the following May that stronger efforts were made to launch such a title. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 15 December 1824; MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 11 May 1825.

⁹⁸ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, 1, June 1825.

⁹⁹ By the late 1820s, early editions were in the process of being reprinted and supplements were frequently added. [Anti-Slavery Society], *Accounts of Receipts and Disbursements*, 1823-31.

treasurer. The latter, like its male counterpart, was an active distributor: in 1830 the Liverpool Ladies circulated hundreds of copies of thirteen tracts and similar quantities of five new titles in the following year. Although men's societies frequently sent similar proceeds from publications, they were far less regular and their peak donations were more obviously sent in petitioning years.

With so many titles in circulation, it is unsurprising that anthologies were popular. J. B. G. Vogel, the owner of the Camberwell Press in London, produced a pamphlet entitled *Anecdotes* which contained extracts from national abolitionist pamphlets.¹⁰⁰ In 1830, the Newcastle Ladies Anti-Slavery Association produced *A Concise View of Colonial Slavery* which extracted information from various works. Indeed, women's societies were particularly active in this field with the production of 'anti-slavery albums' containing reprints of tracts, poems and prints in hard-bound volumes. Workbags including a compendium of materials were also distributed in the late 1820s by Ladies Auxiliaries.¹⁰¹ Over half the money raised by the Female Society for Birmingham in 1826 was spent on the production of workbags which contained reprints of tracts and cards supporting abstention.¹⁰² As Midgley has noted, workbags were 'an acceptable feminine activity for a practical and philanthropic end' and through their distribution narrowed the gap between public and private fields of activity.¹⁰³

An interesting but overlooked aspect of women's anthologies and other anti-slavery tracts is the increasing use of West Indian sources by abolitionists. Clarkson's 'Negro Slavery' article in the *Christian Observer* was the first to use evidence from the *Jamaican Gazette* to disprove claims that the West Indian slave was better treated than the British peasant. Subsequently, the Birmingham Ladies group used the same periodical to advance their case: 'if we see 100 slaves advertised from the workhouse in one week's *Jamaican Gazette*, and many of them described by their brand-marks, scars, and wounds, and the indelible marks of the lacerations of the cart-whip, we may be sure that great cruelty exists...' The Birmingham workbags also included a planter's 'Account of a Shooting Excursion on the Mountains near Dromilly Estate' which described brutal attempts to capture maroons and inadvertently showed the industry of the free slaves and the violence and inhumanity of the planters.¹⁰⁴ Damning

¹⁰⁰ J. B. G. Vogel, *Anecdotes* (1826). This pamphlet was widely disseminated by the Liverpool Society, MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/12.

¹⁰¹ MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/12. This volume, containing Cropper's records, is one such album.

¹⁰² Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁴ Anon, *Account of a Shooting Excursion on the Mountains near Dromilly Estate, in the Parish in Trelawny, and Island of Jamaica, in the month of October 1824* (1825).

evidence direct from the planters was reinforced by eye-witness accounts from those with abolitionist sympathies, such as Rev. Bickell's *The West Indies as they are*.¹⁰⁵ In this way, workbags and individual tracts like Clarkson's essay produced anthologies of West Indian literature.

The distribution and revision of London's tracts was only one part of the burgeoning publishing work taken on by local societies in the 1820s. Local committees and individual abolitionists also produced their own pamphlets.¹⁰⁶ Turley has estimated that 'during most, but not all, of the years of high levels of antislavery publications a significant proportion of titles (50 per cent in some years) were published in provincial towns or in the provinces and London at the same time.'¹⁰⁷ Annual reports were some of the most prevalent and accessible pamphlets issued by local abolitionists. Reports explained in simple language the progress of 'colonial reform' and the state of the cause and were often anthologies in their own right. They also presented the key points of anti-slavery ideology, usually in the form of resolutions, and provided information on the success of local endeavours: for example, ladies societies often quoted the number of families abstaining.¹⁰⁸ Lists of subscribers and their donations also advertised the social respectability of the cause: the Swansea and Neath Society proudly announced a host of aristocratic patrons including the Marquess of Bute as vice-president.¹⁰⁹ Handbills of rules and 'the object' of local societies were also straightforward and inexpensive publicity material. The Hanley and Shelton Society recruited clergymen, manufacturers and other neighbouring societies through the distribution of 250 copies of their rules.¹¹⁰

Confrontation with local West Indians was an impetus to publication at the local level. Men's auxiliaries were asked to correct misconceptions made in pamphlets and newspapers, a task which brought abolitionists to use the popular press. In March 1824, the *Macclesfield Courier* printed a virulent attack against local abolitionists but

¹⁰⁵ Richard Bickell, *The West Indies as they are; or a real picture of slavery, but more particularly as it exists in the island of Jamaica* (1825). This is a reprint of an article which first appeared in the *Christian Observer*, March 1825.

¹⁰⁶ The report of the Manchester Society for 1827 distinguished between those tracts which they had forwarded to subscribers and interested parties in neighbouring areas and their own 'Short Essays and Pamphlets calculated to excite attention to the Subject.' Manchester Anti-Slavery Society, *Report of the Committee of the Manchester Society for the Furtherance of the Gradual Abolition of Slavery and the Amelioration of the Condition of Slaves in the British Colonies* (Manchester, 1827).

¹⁰⁷ Turley, *op.cit.*, p51.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Female Society for Birmingham, *Report of the Female Society of Birmingham for the Relief of Negro Slaves* (Birmingham, 1826).

¹⁰⁹ Turley, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

¹¹⁰ MSS Minute book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society, Hanley Library, Staffordshire. Entries for 1829-30.

its biased and 'misinformed' report of a public meeting sparked an abolitionist response.¹¹¹ Joshua Thorley, a grocer and leader of the local Methodists, remarked:

'Unaccustomed as I am to address the public through the medium of the press, I should probably have borne in silence the unprovoked violence and scorn with which I, and others, have been assailed in the official article of your two last papers, if you had abstained from using the envenomed weapons of calumnious misrepresentation.'¹¹²

The fierce debate which erupted in the Macclesfield paper soon infected the rest of the Cheshire press. Both the *Chester Guardian* and the *Stockport Advertiser* printed reports of the meeting which were favourable to the abolitionists and attacked the *Courier's* editorial.¹¹³ The debate in the press reinforced abolitionist activity across the county: the editor of the *Stockport Advertiser* congratulated the Macclesfield committee on its activity and proudly announced that a petition for gradual abolition had been raised in Stockport and adopted unanimously.¹¹⁴

The Macclesfield debate illustrates one way in which abolitionists used the press. Provincial abolitionists also used newspapers by writing letters to editors or reprinting extracts from official publications. Clarkson, ever aware to the need to harness local newspapers, left a copy of Macaulay's *Negro Slavery* with the editor of the Stamford paper, 'and pointed out the parts fit for the Paper, begging him at the same time to insert the *Thoughts* during the vacation.'¹¹⁵ The committees in Nottingham, Edinburgh and Hull also agreed to use their local newspapers to disseminate the latest information extracted from London pamphlets.¹¹⁶ The timing of these forays into the use of the press is suggestive of the wider pattern of activity pursued by male auxiliaries. Letters to local newspapers often specifically encouraged signatures for petitions. Abolitionists in Sheffield and Pontefract wrote letters to their local newspapers to draw attention to petitions then being signed.¹¹⁷ The Hull and East Riding Anti-Slavery Association engaged the local *Advertiser* to print their statements and reports to draw attention to public meetings.¹¹⁸ Thus, male auxiliaries used the press sparingly but deliberately, either countering attacks made against them or raising

¹¹¹ *Macclesfield Courier*, 3 April 1824; *The Anti-Slavery Meeting versus the Macclesfield Courier* (Macclesfield, 1824), pp. 14-19.

¹¹² *The Anti-Slavery Meeting versus the Macclesfield Courier* (Macclesfield, 1824), p. 23.

¹¹³ *Chester Guardian*, 8 April 1824; *Stockport Advertiser*, 9 April 1824; *The Anti-Slavery Meeting versus the Macclesfield Courier* (Macclesfield, 1824), pp. 20-22.

¹¹⁴ *Stockport Advertiser*, 9 April 1824.

¹¹⁵ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 13 July 1823.

¹¹⁶ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 24 July 1823, 6 August 1823, 15 August 1823.

¹¹⁷ *Sheffield Mercury*, 29 January 1826; *Wakefield and Halifax Journal*, 30 April 1830.

¹¹⁸ *Hull Advertiser*, 4 January 1828.

the profile of local meetings, both of which coincided with the renewal of petitions to Parliament.

While women may have been discouraged by the London Society from entering directly into bitter debates in the newspapers, they did not shy away from the use of the press. The Sheffield, Chelmsford and Dublin Ladies societies each used local newspapers at various times to appeal for subscriptions, advertise their proceedings and publicise the national cause.¹¹⁹ There were, of course, some women involved in the public press who could aid the cause. The formation of the Wakefield Anti-Slavery Society in 1825 was advertised by Mrs Hurst, an abolitionist Unitarian printer who published the *Wakefield and Halifax Journal* after her husband's death.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, as Midgley notes, 'men's regular and consistent use of the press contrasts with its sporadic use by women.'¹²¹

An important consequence of these debates was their compilation into pamphlets, some of which found their way into wider circulation. The articles in the Cheshire papers were collected in a pamphlet entitled *The Anti-Slavery Meeting versus the Macclesfield Courier* and printed in 1824. Cropper was beaten to the publication of his debates with John Gladstone by the Liverpool West India Committee who clearly thought Gladstone had won the day. The Rev. Thomas Cooper of Shelton in North Staffordshire, who had been the guest speaker at the Macclesfield anti-slavery meeting, wrote a pamphlet in response to an attack on him by a local West Indian, Robert Hibbert, junior. Cooper was accused of employing a black woman in England, Sarah Brissett, as a domestic slave in his household. Cooper's response is not notable for its argument, its forcefulness or the illustration which was drawn of slavery's illegality in Britain. Indeed, it is not notable for the writing skills of the Reverend at all but for those of his wife who forcefully defended Cooper and launched her own attack on the institution of slavery within the pamphlet's pages. Ann Cooper initially clarified the situation by stating that Brissett was a former slave who had been sent to England after the birth of Ann's first child to act as a nurse maid. But she extended her response to lash out at Hibbert and 'the tottering system of tyranny.'¹²² Rev. Cooper's correspondence with Hibbert was the first tract accepted by the London Society which included the writing of a woman.

¹¹⁹ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

¹²⁰ MSS Haxby and Scholey draft bill book, John Goodchild Collection, Wakefield, p. 591.

¹²¹ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

¹²² Thomas and Ann Cooper, *Letter to Robert Hibbert, Jun., in reply to his pamphlet...* (1824).

Thus, local societies were not as insular as the prevalence of annual reports and tracts on local skirmishes may suggest. The *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, for instance, was preceded by a provincial attempt to produce regular reports on the state of the cause. *The Anti-Slavery Magazine, and Recorder of the Progress of Christianity in the Countries connected with Slavery* was a monthly journal issued by the Derby Society during 1824. In January, they contacted the Liverpool Society who consented to receive one hundred copies each month; the London Society ordered double that amount.¹²³ The *Anti-Slavery Magazine* was a reaction to, as well as an example of, the unprecedented number of abolitionist tracts then in circulation. Space was regularly set aside to take notice of new publications and to review them.¹²⁴ Indeed, the *Magazine* was designed as a forum for discussing the slavery question and introducing new supporters to the cause. In their introduction to the first issue, the editors proposed to extend an understanding of the history and effects of slavery and to print brief biographies of eminent slaves, free blacks and abolitionists. But it was also an important channel for news and reports. Several issues contained details of the exertions for gradual abolition across the country as well as other ‘articles of curiosity’ including the report of a Norwich meeting and the official report of the Society for the Conversion of West Indian Slaves.

The Derby *Magazine* was first and foremost an advocate of the London Society and rallied to its calls. In the July issue, the first anniversary meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society was discussed and, in November, the first report was reprinted. The editors supported the national cause by attempting to reassure sympathisers of the propriety of renewing petitions in 1824, and condemned the exaggeration of West Indians who were ‘placarding threats of vengeance’ in the national press.¹²⁵ The second issue appealed to the public to speak ‘not with the noise of clamour, nor the violence of passion, but with the calmness of determination.’¹²⁶ The *Magazine* was also firmly gradualist: the March 1824 issue contained a report on missionary activity which advocated the extension of religious education as ‘the best and surest foundation for the improvement of the civil as well as the moral condition of the negroes in the West Indian colonies.’ In the same issue, a letter was printed from an anonymous author who argued that mitigation was the abolitionists’ first duty and, in December, attempts to Christianise the slaves were once more given full attention. The *Anti-Slavery Magazine* effectively reflected the views and campaigns of the London Society and

¹²³ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 20 January 1824.

¹²⁴ *Anti-Slavery Magazine* (Derby, 1824), No. 1, 31 January 1824, p. 4.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 2, 29 February 1824, p. 25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

attempted to create and mobilise new abolitionist support in the same way as the *Monthly Reporter* would over a year later.

Local societies, on the whole, tended to follow the official line, although many used new sources of information. The Whitby Anti-Slavery Society, for instance, printed a pamphlet entitled *How do we Procure Sugar?* in 1828 which sought to prove Cropper's critique of the duties system by using the testimony of a local naval officer.¹²⁷ The Durham abolitionists provided Clarkson with letters from a surgeon in the West Indies which showed how his attitude towards slave conditions mellowed. After months in the islands, the initially horrified doctor finally remarked that the slaves were better off than the British peasantry.¹²⁸ In this way, local societies also revived their often overlooked information-gathering function. Liverpool's importance to the revived cause can be attributed to 'the local advantages incident to a great commercial place, and the opportunities it affords of obtaining information respecting the present state of slavery.'¹²⁹ Adam Hodgson, the secretary of the Liverpool Society, wrote to his American business contacts regularly and Cropper sent the information Hodgson's received relating to American slavery to Macaulay, even before the formation of the London Society.¹³⁰ The data they compiled was subsequently used by Hodgson and Cropper in pamphlets later adopted and published in greater number by the London Society. The information-gathering function of provincial societies serves to underline the fact that on some occasions local supporters of the cause were in the front line and faced criticism and abuse.

Obviously, some local societies were more active in the work of disseminating information than others. Cropper's Liverpool Society undertook the distribution of pamphlets to 'Cheshire, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and all parts north of them and also Ireland and the United States of America.'¹³¹ Cropper's album of anti-slavery material lists the names and addresses of over 150 correspondents in Great Britain, 45 in Ireland, and 17 in North America - including Charles Denison, editor of *The Emancipator* and the great American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.¹³² His ledger included orders sent overseas, especially for the years 1827 to 1831, which reveals the immense transatlantic traffic in *Monthly Reporters*.¹³³ The Liverpool

¹²⁷ Whitby Anti-Slavery Society, *How do we Procure Sugar? A Question proposed for the Consideration of the People of Great Britain, by a Naval Officer* (Whitby, 1828).

¹²⁸ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 22 December 1824.

¹²⁹ Liverpool Anti-Slavery Society, *Declaration of Objects* (Liverpool, 1823).

¹³⁰ Davis, 'James Cropper, 1821-23.' *passim*.

¹³¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 23 April 1823.

¹³² MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/12-38.

¹³³ The Album appears to be the compendium I have discussed, in hardback form, in which Cropper noted many anti-slavery business dealings. MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/12.

Ladies society was also extremely active in the distribution of pamphlets and workbags, and regularly traded with the similarly active Peckham Ladies association.¹³⁴ However, neither society was as influential as the Female Society for Birmingham. In 1826, the Female Society spent half as much money as the national Anti-Slavery Society on publications.¹³⁵ They were also heavily involved in the publication and promotion of other abolitionist tracts, especially those written by and largely for women. Through the network of district treasurers, the Female Society for Birmingham's reach extended throughout the British Isles, running parallel to the London Society's network of correspondents.

Where both male and female abolitionists were similarly active was in the use and encouragement of lending libraries. The Dublin Negro's Friend Society resolved to open a library for the use of all and to act as a depository for tracts circulated among Irish auxiliary societies.¹³⁶ Both the male and female societies in Birmingham formed libraries to house their numerous pamphlets. The Sheffield Ladies Society also used libraries in 1831 and again in 1833.¹³⁷ The use of lending libraries increased during campaign years.¹³⁸ In the Potteries, where the population was highly literate,¹³⁹ the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society used chapel libraries and religious affiliation to organise the circulation of *Monthly Reporters*. The committee was divided into six lists: the first on the list read the issue, held on to it for a week and showed it to friends, then passed it to the second person and so on. After three or four weeks, the final name on each list deposited the *Reporter* in one of the libraries of the townships: the chapel libraries of the Tabernacle, Baptists, Unitarians and Methodists and the Bethesda school library. The final copy was distributed freely among the workers at Wedgwood's Etruria factory.¹⁴⁰ Aside from lending libraries, *Monthly Reporters* and other tracts could be obtained from 'the Depôts of the several Societies.'¹⁴¹ Abolitionists also used booksellers who frequently acted as couriers for the receipt of parcels from London.¹⁴² The publishing activities of local societies was made possible through the continued assistance of printers and booksellers favourable to the cause.

¹³⁴ MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/12-39.

¹³⁵ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

¹³⁶ Dublin Negro's Friend Society circular, begins: 'The objects of this Society are...' (Dublin, 1829).

¹³⁷ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 223, *fn* 10.

¹³⁸ In February 1828, Cropper made note of several books, including volumes of the *Monthly Reporter*, to be sent to the lending library on Slater Street. MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/12 - 51.

¹³⁹ MSS Clarkson's Diary: 15 September 1823.

¹⁴⁰ MSS Minute book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 10 July 1829.

¹⁴¹ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 1 (June 1825).

¹⁴² In February 1828, R. Dickenson's in Liverpool held several copies of each of the *Monthly Reporter's* first forty issues and had on order numerous copies of forty-three other titles from the London Society. MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/12 - 35.

The distribution of official publications, the growth of women's associations, and the efforts made to counter misconceptions provided the London Society with a wealth of cheap, enthusiastic pamphlet literature which broadly supported their position.¹⁴³ Local auxiliaries frequently submitted pamphlets and other forms of propaganda to the London Committee for wider distribution: we have already seen that the Liverpool Society was particularly active in this regard. In September 1824, the Edinburgh Committee presented their *Considerations on Negro Slavery* to the Anti-Slavery Society for its approval and publication.¹⁴⁴ Local societies in Leicester, Norwich, and Birmingham also found their tracts were accepted and circulated.¹⁴⁵ Some local writers, such as the prolific T. S. Winn, asked for assistance in circulating tracts they had already written and produced.¹⁴⁶ Cooper's debate with Hibbert was printed in two forms by the London Committee in 1824.¹⁴⁷ But we have also seen that the impetus for men's auxiliaries was often petitioning. In the malaise of 1828-29, when nationwide mobilisation was unsuccessful, it was female efforts which kept the cause alive. Ironically, the restrictions placed on the public activities of women helped the anti-slavery movement to be sustained in these crucial years.¹⁴⁸

'TO RAISE SUBSCRIPTIONS...'

In October 1823, *Blackwood's Magazine* sarcastically characterised abolitionist auxiliary societies as 'those great money-collecting Associations.'¹⁴⁹ Fund-raising was an integral part of the activity of the branch societies affiliated to charitable, religious and philanthropic bodies. Male and female anti-slavery associations were encouraged to raise subscriptions to defray the expenses they incurred through the dissemination of pamphlets and other information. But they were also asked to help to defray the expense of 'similar societies,' especially the national society in London. Making a donation was also a show of sincere commitment to the cause: as the Sheffield abolitionists noted:

¹⁴³ With the advent of the *Monthly Reporter*, the London Committee could draw on the activities of local societies directly. Newspaper reports of local meetings were reprinted for distribution throughout the country: at the height of the 1830-31 petition campaign, the *Reporter* devoted an entire issue of over fifty pages to these reports. *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 74 (January 1831).

¹⁴⁴ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 23 September 1824.

¹⁴⁵ [Anti-Slavery Society], *Accounts of Receipts and Disbursements*, for years 1824-28.

¹⁴⁶ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 27 July 1825, 21 September 1825.

¹⁴⁷ [Anti-Slavery Society], *Accounts of Receipts and Disbursements*, 1824.

¹⁴⁸ See, in particular, the precise context of these years discussed at the beginning of chapter 10.

¹⁴⁹ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, October 1823. Article entitled 'The West Indian Controversy.'

'He deceives that flatters and complains
But he who gives his money, never feigns.'¹⁵⁰

In this section, we will consider the ways in which money was raised locally and nationally, the financial relationship between London and the provinces, and the ways in which local abolitionists controlled their own donations.

Subscriptions were solicited from the public in a number of different ways. Men's societies appealed for subscriptions in the local press or paid for the insertion of London's frequent requests for donations in newspapers. Public meetings, especially those at which local men's auxiliary societies were formed, typically ended with the opening of a subscription for defraying the expenses of the agitation.¹⁵¹ Subscriptions also endorsed the activities of a pre-existing local association which had not been publicly recognised.¹⁵² Women's societies, who were reluctant to use such public means but occasionally printed appeals in the newspapers,¹⁵³ moved more within their own circles of kinship and friendship and relied on donations from other local supporters of charitable, denominational and philanthropic causes. Mary Rawson drew on her connection to members of the Bible and missionary societies in Sheffield as well as her own family and friends, as did the committee for the Liverpool Ladies.¹⁵⁴ There is also limited evidence to suggest that female abolitionists looked to their menfolk for donations: the accounts of the Liverpool Ladies Anti-Slavery Society for 1828 show that ten of the twenty-seven subscribers were men, all of whom were related to the society's officers.¹⁵⁵ Ladies associations in Sheffield and Birmingham also conducted door-to-door canvassing, principally for the distribution of pamphlets, and may have solicited subscriptions by these means.¹⁵⁶ Indeed the sale of publications and workbags was another source of income.¹⁵⁷ Local societies may also have benefited from collections raised by individuals.¹⁵⁸ On some occasions, abolitionists

¹⁵⁰ *Sheffield Mercury*, 14 June 1828.

¹⁵¹ At one meeting, subscriptions were solicited explicitly to pay for the cost of just a petition. *Sheffield Mercury*, 3 May 1823.

¹⁵² In Nottingham, the final resolution of a meeting approved of the local society and recommended its financial support to 'all those persons who are friends to this interesting cause.' *Nottingham Herald*, 18 January 1825.

¹⁵³ Midgley quotes the example of the Sheffield Ladies society, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁴ MSS Minute book of Sheffield Ladies Anti-Slavery Association in John Rylands Library, University of Manchester; MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/13-38.

¹⁵⁵ MSS Cropper Papers, D/CR/12-53.

¹⁵⁶ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁷ Although many of the publications forwarded to local societies by the London Society were sent *gratis*. MSS Minute book of Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society. 16 April 1829. This information was reported by the Secretary to be the typical of the relationship between London and provincial societies.

¹⁵⁸ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 5 April 1826. Mr. Bailey of Uxbridge raised £20 through a collection.

had to pay for admittance to lectures: Godwin charged an entrance fee of one shilling during his lecture tour of the West Riding in 1830.¹⁵⁹ Both men's and ladies' societies employed banks to receive subscriptions on their behalf.

The amount of money subscribed or donated by individuals within an association's membership and from place to place differed wildly. The Dublin Negro's Friend Society, established in July 1829, set the annual membership fee at one pound.¹⁶⁰ The Female Society for Birmingham dropped its subscription for annual membership from twelve shillings in its first year to between five and twelve shillings in its second.¹⁶¹ This was perhaps an attempt to widen the membership of ladies societies or a positive reaction to the interest found among the working class during local canvasses. The records of the Hanley and Shelton society show that annual subscriptions in the Potteries ranged from between one guinea at the highest to two shillings and sixpence at the lowest. Members generally renewed subscriptions of the same amount.¹⁶² The Society also collected donations from the working class: in 1829, their treasurer recorded a total of seventeen shillings raised in 'sundry small subscriptions' from Wedgwood's Etruria factory.¹⁶³ An annual subscription was effectively a donation but also bought members copies of pamphlets. Subscribers to the Female Society for Birmingham were 'entitled to receive papers and other documents, to the value of one half of their Subscriptions, Donations or Collections, as well as one copy each month, of the Monthly *Anti-Slavery Reporter*.¹⁶⁴ In this way, generous subscriptions could subsidise the distribution of the *Reporter* and other tracts among those whose donation was considerably smaller.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 27 March 1830.

¹⁶⁰ Dublin Negro's Friend Society circular, begins: 'The objects of the society...' (Dublin, 1829).

¹⁶¹ Female Society of Birmingham, *First Report of The Female Society for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their respective neighbourhoods* (Birmingham, 1826); Female Society of Birmingham, *Second Report of The Female Society for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their respective neighbourhoods* (Birmingham, 1826). The Dublin Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, on its formation in 1828, also set its subscription at 5s annually. (*Rules and Resolutions of the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, with lists of the district treasurers, committee and secretaries, and of the subscribers* (Dublin, 1828).

¹⁶² MSS Minute Book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society. Subscriptions at back of volume.

¹⁶³ MSS Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society Cash Book, Wedgwood collection on deposit at Keele University Archives, E32/24754-A.

¹⁶⁴ Dublin Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, *Rules and Resolutions of the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, with lists of the district treasurers, committee and secretaries, and of the subscribers* (Dublin, 1828).

¹⁶⁵ Members of the Dublin Negro's Friend Society also received the *Reporter* free of charge and could purchase other pamphlets at cost price. Dublin Negro's Friend Society circular, begins: 'The objects of the society...' (Dublin, 1829).

A large proportion of these funds raised by provincial committees was spent on deferring their own expenses. We have already noted the work undertaken by auxiliaries and associations in the publication of their own annual reports, advertisements, pamphlets and, in the case of ladies' societies, workbags. The Female Society for Birmingham raised over £900 in 1826, of which £500 was expended on workbags and £200 on its own propaganda.¹⁶⁶ The Manchester men's auxiliary raised £438 in subscriptions in the same year, all of which was expended by the society on its own activities, principally the production of cheap tracts distributed throughout the neighbouring area.¹⁶⁷ In 1830, the Sheffield Ladies Anti-Slavery Association printed an anthology of abolitionist poems for the Rotherham Ladies bazaar to help to defer the latter's expenses.¹⁶⁸ The business of petitioning was also reasonably expensive, although the London Society, in an attempt to increase the number of petitions, noted to men's auxiliaries that they could be sent on parchment and not skins.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, in 1826, the Wakefield Society spent over three pounds on the purchase of six skins and in payment for their preparation for signatures - a similar additional amount was expended on advertising the public meeting and issuing handbills appealing for signatures.¹⁷⁰

Once these expenses were deferred, local societies could donate a small proportion of their funds to the London Society. But it is now becoming apparent that the London Society had to compete with other good causes for a portion of the funds raised across the country. The network of ladies anti-slavery associations was built around the Female Society for Birmingham and not the London Anti-Slavery Society.¹⁷¹ Their system of district treasurers not only prompted the creation of almost fifty associated ladies societies across the country by 1832 but constituted a parallel channel for the raising of funds. In 1829, the Female Society for Birmingham raised £300 in receipts from 26 district treasurers - in the same year, the London Society received almost the same amount from women's associations.¹⁷² Louis and Rosamund Billington attributed the downturn in the Anti-Slavery Society's annual income in 1828 to the

¹⁶⁶ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁶⁷ Manchester Anti-Slavery Society, *Report of the Committee of the Manchester Society for the Furtherance of the Gradual Abolition of Slavery and the Amelioration of the Condition of Slaves in the British Colonies* (Manchester, 1827).

¹⁶⁸ [Mary Rawson (ed.)], *A Word for the Slave, by the Ladies of the Sheffield Anti-Slavery Association: and A Cry from Africa by James Montgomery* (Sheffield, 1830).

¹⁶⁹ [Anti-Slavery Society], *Rules for the Formation of Anti-Slavery Associations* (n.d.).

¹⁷⁰ MSS Haxby and Scholey draft bill book, John Goodchild Collection, Wakefield, p. 591.

¹⁷¹ On its formation in 1828, the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society announced that it was in correspondence with the Birmingham Ladies group but did not mention London.

¹⁷² Female Society for Birmingham, *Fifth Report of The Female Society for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their respective neighbourhoods* (Birmingham, 1830); [Anti-Slavery Society], *Accounts of Receipts and Disbursements*, 1829.

development of the network of ladies associations which sent donations directly to Birmingham.¹⁷³

Women's societies also made frequent gifts to other charitable causes often for the conversion or education of British slaves unlike their male counterparts. Individual women were always prominent subscribers of the 'Association for the Relief of some cases of Great Distress in the island of Antigua among the Discarded Negroes' but from 1825 ladies associations gave large donations to the same fund.¹⁷⁴ Although there is clear evidence of male abolitionists subscribing to this fund, including the Tukes of York, no male society was listed as sending a donation. Women were also subscribers to the fund raised by the African Institution for the promotion of missionary work in West Africa.¹⁷⁵ The multiplicity of good causes to which female abolitionist devoted their attention is underlined by the resolutions of the Dublin Ladies Society. After defraying its own expenses, the Society resolved to place money 'at the disposal of such Societies, in England or elsewhere, as gave for their object the circulation of information, or the relief of distressed negroes in the Colonies, or the education of the slave population...' Grants were also to be given to agents in the colonies who could 'benefit and console the aged, the sick, the lame, the blind, the deranged, and the broken hearted, among the deserted slaves... and for the formation and support of schools.'¹⁷⁶ As Midgley has noted, this concern was an extension of women's pre-existing involvement in charitable endeavours and combined their interest in matters of principle with their desire to promote practical aid.¹⁷⁷

It was amid competing appeals for funds that the Anti-Slavery Society frequently appealed to abolitionists across the country for financial aid. The cost of renewed mobilisation was extremely expensive. In September 1823, the London Society, already overdrawn, calculated that the demands on the Society 'cannot be computed at less than £1000.'¹⁷⁸ Debts in the wake of the 1824 mobilisation led to another appeal

¹⁷³ Louis and Rosamund Billington, 'A Burning Zeal for Righteousness,' pp. 82-111, in Jane Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different - Women's Politics, 1800-1914* (Oxford, New York, 1987), p. 86.

¹⁷⁴ Eighth to fifteen reports of the 'Association for the Relief of some cases of Great Distress in the island of Antigua among the Discarded Negroes, &c.' (1820-26).

¹⁷⁵ African Institution, *Second report of a Committee managing a fund raised for the purpose of promoting African instruction* (1824).

¹⁷⁶ Dublin Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, *Rules and Resolutions of the Dublin Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, with lists of the district treasurers, committee and secretaries, and of the subscribers* (Dublin, 1828).

¹⁷⁷ Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁷⁸ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 9 September 1823.

to individuals and committees for subscriptions.¹⁷⁹ As the West Indian lobby launched its counter-attack in the light of popular abolitionism, the demands on the London Society's funds further increased. In February 1825, the finance committee regretted that 'some of the Colonial Legislatures [had] voted large sums for the purpose of engaging and rewarding the services of the Press in defence of the Slave system, and in otherwise counteracting the efforts of the Society.'¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, despite a variety of appeals on their finances, local associations provided a significant proportion of the London Society's income. Within one month of the first circular appeal to provincial sympathisers, the finance committee had received over £130 in subscriptions and in November the Edinburgh Society contributed £100, enough to relieve the immediate debt.¹⁸¹ The amount of money forwarded to the London Society differed dramatically from place to place. In 1826, the lowest donation from an auxiliary was £1 from the York Association, the highest was £92 from the Leeds Society.¹⁸² Ladies societies were particularly forthcoming and slowly overtook men's auxiliaries in their donations. In 1826, approximately 13% of the London Society's total income derived from men's auxiliaries compared to only 3.5% from ladies' associations. However, in 1828, while contributions from men's societies had risen slightly to 18%, those from women's groups had risen dramatically to 22%. Women's groups were increasingly more generous than men's societies in their donations while simultaneously funding their own and complementary endeavours.

The frequently recurring poor state of the London Society's finances was clearly a matter of great concern. One immediate consequence was the transfer of the role of publisher to the provinces.¹⁸³ Provincial abolitionists were actively encouraged to pursue private publication of their tracts: the London Society returned a poem to James Montgomery, the Sheffield abolitionist, which they declined to publish themselves but expressed their 'approbation of its merits and wish to see it in circulation.'¹⁸⁴ It is unsurprising, then, that provincial abolitionists appear to have

¹⁷⁹ The first report of the Anti-Slavery Society was accompanied by an appeal from the finance committee for subscriptions and donations. Many more prominent sympathisers were also contacted directly for contributions. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 27 July 1824.

¹⁸⁰ Anti-Slavery Society circular, begins: 'At a Meeting of the Committee on the 2nd of February, 1825...' (London, 1825).

¹⁸¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 24 October 1823, 18 November 1823.

¹⁸² In 1828, donations ranged from £3 6s. to £90; and in 1829, from ten shillings to £64.

¹⁸³ During the 1820s, the London Society paid T. S. Winn for a number of pamphlets but in February 1824 they did not feel 'justified to make him a further advance upon his publication from the present state of their Funds.' MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 17 February 1824.

¹⁸⁴ Montgomery's poem was later published by Mary Rawson (ed.), *A Word for the Slave and The Bow in the Cloud*, anthologies of abolitionist poems printed for the Sheffield Ladies Society. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 23 March 1825.

doubted the Anti-Slavery Society's business acumen. In September 1827, J. Barker of Pontefract asked for details of the Society's accounts:

'We had intended to forward to London fresh subscriptions whenever there appeared a necessity for further exertions on behalf of the Society; but permit me candidly to state that for my own part I shall decline soliciting for any more subscriptions in aid of the Society in London until we are furnished with a Statement of the Accounts; for as we obtained the subscriptions for aiding the abolition of slavery, on our own responsibility I certainly, without any disrespect to the Committee in London, feel it my duty to know how the money is appropriated.'

The Committee regarded Barker's complaint as being of 'the utmost importance' and ordered that the finance committee produce regular monthly accounts which could be printed and circulated at a moment's notice.¹⁸⁵ The unwillingness of provincial societies to raise subscriptions without draft copies of the Society's accounts suggests that fund-raisers and subscribers wanted to make sure that their money was well-spent and on the causes that mattered. Cropper stipulated that his donation of £500 should be used exclusively to aid Clarkson's tour. In 1824, one member of the Anti-Slavery committee donated £20 for aiding the distribution of Mr Stephen's work 'for the use of Reading Rooms.'¹⁸⁶ In the following year, the Female Society for Birmingham gave £3 to the Anti-Slavery Society in 1825 'for printing a small Work in the Welch [*sic*] language.'¹⁸⁷ Midgley has noted how women made selective use of their funds to support favoured campaigns, most notably in their patronage of the Agency Committee in 1831.¹⁸⁸

Although subscriptions from local auxiliaries were important sources of financial aid for the London Society, it is clear that the movement's chief benefactor was the Society of Friends. Again, this illustrates the contribution made by the provinces as the Meeting for Suffering's sub-committee was funded through the network of Yearly, Quarterly and Monthly meetings. Although this was another competing source of revenue for the London Society, individual Quakers were highly generous benefactors in a number of causes and contributed similarly large donations to both funds. The result of the appeal to the Quaker network is testimony to the Society's wealth and organisation: in May 1826, the Quaker sub-committee's balance stood at £8,788 of

¹⁸⁵ October saw the first of these accounts statements distributed with an accompanying circular letter appealing for subscriptions. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 5 September 1827, 9 October 1827.

¹⁸⁶ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 2 March 1824.

¹⁸⁷ Female Society of Birmingham, *First Report of The Female Society for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their respective neighbourhoods* (Birmingham, 1826).

¹⁸⁸ Midgley, *op.cit.*, pp. 52-53.

which all but £200 had been raised through subscriptions.¹⁸⁹ By contrast, the Anti-Slavery Society received just under £3,000 in donations, subscriptions and proceeds from publications in the same year. The sub-committee's fund was a paragon of sound financial management in the great Quaker tradition: a portion of the funds were used to purchase government securities and the committee expected to receive dividends from other investments. The finances of the London Society were dwarfed by comparison.

In 1824, the London Committee forwarded a statement of their finances to the Society of Friends' sub-committee for total abolition and 'invited' them 'to assist in paying the debts which at present dog the labours of the Antislavery Society.'¹⁹⁰ In reply, the Quaker committee sent £300, relieving the Society's debt, but Samuel Hoare and James Cropper each contributed a further £100 to the Society's funds from their own pocket.¹⁹¹ In fact, this was just the first of four similar appeals made by the London Society to the Quakers over the next five years.¹⁹² But the Society of Friends did not assist the London Society solely through donations. In February 1825, the Quaker Committee printed 5,000 copies of the Dromilly Estate shooting excursion pamphlet and donated half to the Anti-Slavery Society 'to promote the circulation of the remainder.'¹⁹³ In May, the Quakers offered to print 10,000 copies of a cheap edition of the Society's second report of which only 3,000 copies had by then been ordered.¹⁹⁴ The Quaker sub-committee also purchased large quantities of the Anti-Slavery Society's tracts for their own distribution: 3,000 copies of the *Progress of Colonial Reform* were purchased in April 1826.¹⁹⁵ Perhaps most significantly the great expense of researching matters of prime importance to the cause was provided by the Quakers. In August 1826, Samuel Gurney obtained £500 from the committee to obtain

¹⁸⁹ MSS Minute book of Meeting for Sufferings Committee for the Total Abolition of the Slave Trade, I, 1820-1829 (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Quaker Committee'): 5 May 1826.

¹⁹⁰ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 27 July 1824. The circulars were evidently not distributed until mid-September.

¹⁹¹ MSS Minutes of Quaker Committee: 3 September 1824.

¹⁹² In March 1825, the Quakers donated £400 in response to a further appeal, and sent a statement 'entertaining a hope, that circumstances may in future be such, as to render its own funds adequate to meet all necessary claims which the persecution of the great cause it is engaged in, may occasion.' (MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 9 March 1825; MSS Minutes of Quaker Committee: 4 May 1825). In February 1826, the London Society received a donation of £1000 from the Quaker fund; in 1827 they received a gift of £500 from the Quaker fund without requesting it! (MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 8 February 1826; MSS Minutes of Quaker Committee: 24 February 1826, 4 May 1827). Two years later, the Quakers waited until they had 'received further information regarding the state of the funds of the Anti-Slavery Society, as well as some details of its expenditure and present engagements' before providing a further £500 (MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 21 July 1829; MSS Minutes of Quaker Committee: 24 July 1829).

¹⁹³ MSS Minutes of Quaker Committee: 4 February 1825.

¹⁹⁴ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 11 and 18 May 1825.

¹⁹⁵ MSS Minutes of Quaker Committee: 28 April 1826.

information on the nature of slavery in Mauritius for the purposes of a Parliamentary investigation. In October 1829, another £500 was granted to finish the project.¹⁹⁶ The Quaker Committee was also generous in other aspects of the cause. 300 Francs were advanced to the French Committee to pay the expense of producing plates on the cruelty of slavery.¹⁹⁷ Substantial donations of over £100 each were granted to encourage agricultural improvements in Sierra Leone, to promote another plan for establishing a model village there, the education of female slaves in Kingston, and numerous aspects of missionary work in the West Indies and Africa.¹⁹⁸ The Society of Friends also raised money to purchase slave freedom: \$1,000 was provided for the removal of slaves from North Carolina.¹⁹⁹ It seems likely that the Quaker's donation of funds in the form of reports was an attempt to see their money well spent. Moreover, it is clear that the work of the Anti-Slavery Society would have paused, faltered or conceivably collapsed had it not been for the financial assistance provided by members of the Society of Friends across the country.

The mid-late 1820s, usually regarded as a barren field for abolitionists activity, was a period of consolidation and development. We have seen in the previous chapter how abolitionist thought developed under the influence of provincial abolitionists, while in this chapter the role played by local societies in advancing the mass of anti-slavery literature and funds has been discussed. Clearly there were a great deal of differences between local societies. In particular, by looking at men's and women's auxiliaries together, one can see the comparative merits of these groups. The timing of mobilisation by these groups is particularly important: men's societies were responsive to London's appeals but principally to petitioning whereas women's societies, which were not asked to support abolition by these public means, were less determined by London's timetable. Thus it is becoming clear, from the work of Midgley and the analysis presented here, that women's societies, forced by circumstances to act in less public ways, were a profound strength for the cause during this period of infrequent petitioning. The lulls between national campaigns, which greatly limited the activity of men's societies, had no such adverse effect on women's groups who continued to act as they did along patterns of traditional charitable exertion.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4 August 1829, 10 October 1829.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1826.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7 October 1825, 23 December 1825, 4 September 1826, 6 July 1827,

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 April 1828.

Chapter Ten

RELIGIOUS MOBILISATION, PROVINCIAL PRESSURE AND THE ABOLITION OF COLONIAL SLAVERY, 1829-33

From 1828, the anti-slavery movement lay in abeyance. Subordinating their own appeals to other pressing political concerns, the London abolitionists barely stirred in the two year before 1830. Meanwhile, however, the catalogue of atrocities committed against the slaves, but especially white missionaries and black Christians, had a profound effect on the religious public in Britain. Non-conformist support for the abolition of slavery, already a fact of provincial abolitionist mobilisation, was recruited at the national level. This period also saw local abolitionists undertaken initiatives designed to publicise the cause more widely than ever before, both geographically and socially. More direct links between provincial activists and the business of national politics were also forged as auxiliaries were asked to canvass for pledges from parliamentary candidates. This change in tactics focused the efforts of the abolitionists on the localities: abolitionists appealed to their candidates rather than to Parliament as a whole and attempted to influence the composition of the Commons in their favour directly. Lobbying, a tactic traditionally used by historians to downplay the activism of the national society, was radicalised as it was transferred to the provinces. Once a favourable political situation had been procured, the abolitionists legitimately claimed to own the national voice. These efforts culminated in the most intensive period of abolitionist mobilisation when the co-ordination of the campaign fell not only to two national societies but also provincial delegates and religious bodies. In short, the final years of colonial slavery saw the abolitionist provinces come of age.

“RELIGIONISTS AWAKE!”¹

RELIGIOUS MOBILISATION AND THE REVIVAL OF 1830

The final years of the campaign against slavery were characterised by the increasing involvement and influence of religious bodies at the national and local levels. Non-conformist denominations, especially the Methodists, urged their membership to use

¹ Handbill. Letter from 'AFRICANUS' dated 8th October 1830 (Sheffield, 1830). Also printed as postscript to Anon., *The West Indian Slave's Address to his Inhuman Oppressors* (Sheffield, 1830).

every constitutional means at their disposal to aid the cause. At the height of the campaign, these groups also appealed to the religious public and Christian ministers to rouse themselves and their congregations to support immediate emancipation. But before this occurred, efforts had to be made to raise the movement from the malaise into which it had sunk. In this work, non-conformists also led the way.

The Anti-Slavery Society, from its formation in 1823, relied on its affiliations within the Protestant dissenting denominations. Cropper approached the Bible and Church missionary societies and the Wesleyan Methodists to obtain contacts for Clarkson's tour in 1823. These same groups were contacted at other times to distribute pamphlets, circulars and appeals for financial aid.² Allies within the Bible, Church Missionary and Methodist societies also provided an efficient channel for news about persecutions and revolts.³ The ready support which the London Society found among non-conformists in the metropolis was mirrored across the country as Clarkson's tours of 1823 and 1824 clearly show. These bonds were strengthened in the 1820s as a result of the high incidence of missionary persecution in the West Indies. As Anstey pointed out, the well-publicised cases of Smith of Demerara and Shrewsbury of Barbados had a profound effect on the proselytising missionary societies and their denominations in Britain.⁴ These groups were horrified to discover that the 250,000 slaves whom the missionary societies had succeeded in converting in the first quarter of the nineteenth century,⁵ were subjected to religious persecution. At a time when metropolitan dissenters were successfully calling for the repeal of restrictions on their civil liberties, the endemic persecution in the West Indies struck a discordant tone.

However, the evolution of non-conformist support for abolition was perhaps not as autonomous as Anstey suggested. The persecution of Smith does not provide a clear turning point. Despite the priming of religious groups to the cause of abolition in 1823, and their *direct* interest in the Smith case, there is surprisingly little overlap between their interests in terms of petitions in 1824. A mere 31% of religious bodies or congregations which sent petitions against the poor treatment of Smith also sent

² MSS Minute books of Committee on Slavery, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Brit. Emp S20 E2/1-5, 5 vols. (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society'), E2/1: 3 June 1823, 9 September 1823.

³ Jabez Bunting, the famous Methodist preacher and a member of the London Committee, was the first individual to bring reports of the Demerara revolt to the attention of the parent society. The London abolitionists immediately asked Joseph Ivimey, the reverend secretary of the Baptist missionary society, to write to all his correspondents in the West Indian outports for accurate information relating to the rebellion. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/1: 24 October 1823.

⁴ D. B. Davis (ed.), Roger Anstey, 'Parliamentary Reform, Methodism and Anti-Slavery Politics, 1829-1833,' *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 2, No. 3 (1981), p. 213.

⁵ Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains. Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, 1982), pp. 247-248.

abolitionist ones. Those areas that did so sent anti-slavery petitions as inhabitants and not as religious groups. Therefore, although the Smith case would seem to be the key moment at which the dissenting congregations were won over to the anti-slavery cause, the petition returns do not bear this out. It was in the years following, when religious persecution was more widely recorded in *consequence* of the Smith case, that the organisational ties between abolitionism and religious non-conformity were deliberately forged. The Anti-Slavery Society made numerous efforts to recruit non-conformists to the cause to bolster support and extend their influence at the national and local levels. In June 1825, the London Society asked its provincial correspondents to distribute their second report to 'persons of real influence and more particularly the Clergy and Dissenting Ministers in their neighbourhood.'⁶ A month later, Richard Watson, secretary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society and a member of the London Anti-Slavery Society, steered a resolution through the Wesleyan Conference which encouraged Methodists to support the anti-slavery cause.⁷ The abolitionists continued to press the Methodists to assist in the following years. At the third annual meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society, the London Committee again called on all Christians to unite against this 'great national iniquity,'⁸ while over the winter months of 1825-26, an address to Christian ministers was distributed by the parent society.⁹ Two weeks after its initial distribution, Watson reported that an edited version of the address would appear in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*.¹⁰ Furthermore, the London Society approached several non-conformist ministers on their own committee to circulate the address among their fellow clergymen.¹¹ By the late 1820s, the Methodist leadership entreated their members actively to support abolition.

It is therefore ironic that the support garnered from the non-conformists sapped the cause during the abortive mobilisation of 1828. This anti-slavery petition campaign was contemporaneous with the revival of agitation for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. The United Committee for repeal was chaired by the veteran abolitionist William Smith and had contacts with three vice-presidents of the Anti-Slavery Society: Brougham, Lushington, and Spring-Rice. Henry Waymouth, a member of the London Committee and vice-president of the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, was extremely active in the movement for repeal.¹² As the abolitionists were

⁶ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 8 June 1825. This was actually the sheet version of the second report, produced by the Society of Friends.

⁷ Anstey, *op.cit.*, p. 213.

⁸ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 21 December 1825.

⁹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 30 November 1825, 28 December 1825, 4 January 1826.

¹⁰ The same periodical also advocated petitioning. Anstey, *op.cit.*, p. 213.

¹¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 25 January 1826.

¹² Thomas W. Davis (ed.), *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, Minutes 1786-90 and 1827-8*, London Record Society (1978), pp. 62-113.

traditionally allied with the Society of Friends and had forged a new alliance with the Methodists, neither of whom became officially involved in the repeal campaign, the overlap of membership between the campaigns may not appear greatly significant.¹³ Nevertheless, the London Society was notably quiet in the early months of 1828: the session represented a low ebb for the anti-slavery lobby and a 'season of almost complete inactivity.' While this was partly a result of the rapid change of ministries and Buxton's sudden illness,¹⁴ a circular to provincial correspondents in 1830 noted that the Society's silence had been in deference to 'the important measures which almost entirely engrossed the attention of the last two sessions of Parliament.'¹⁵

The problems for the abolitionists lay not at the national level but at the local. The United Committee for repeal used the same tactics as the anti-slavery lobby. The general meeting of the Dissenting Deputies in 1823 resolved to campaign for the repeal by making efforts 'to enlighten the public mind... and by earnest application to the legislature at every possible opportunity.'¹⁶ In 1827-28, the United Committee published tracts, issued a regular monthly journal (*Test Act Reporter*), stitched copies of works into other magazines of wider circulation, and pressed for petitions. There is no denying that popular enthusiasm in favour or even against the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts vastly exceeded that aroused for the abolition of slavery in the same year. In 1827, the House of Commons was inundated with 1,114 petitions from non-conformist groups; in the following year that number rose to 1,362 (twenty-eight petitions were also received against repeal).¹⁷ Over 500 petitions appealing *against* the granting of catholic emancipation were received in 1829.¹⁸ By contrast, the abolitionists could only raise 217 petitions in the spring of 1828 despite a nationwide appeal.¹⁹ While non-conformists had always provided valuable and consistent support for slave emancipation, repeal was the principal topic of political conversation and attention in 1828 and 1829. Samuel Roberts was convinced that it lay as the root cause of the Anti-Slavery Society's lamentable inactivity:

¹³ Aside from Weymouth and Smith, only the Methodist Richard Watson agreed to promote the repeal cause. Although many members of the abolitionist leaders were undoubtedly sympathetic, this was not universal: Joseph Ivimey, the Baptist minister on the national Anti-Slavery committee, depreciated the repealers' efforts out of fear of catholic emancipation. Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, 2 vols., vol. II (1995), p. 420.

¹⁴ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 39, August 1828.

¹⁵ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2; Anti-Slavery Society, Circular dated June 24, 1830.

¹⁶ Quoted in Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. II, p. 419.

¹⁷ Thomas W. Davis (ed.), *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, p. xxi.

¹⁸ Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. II, p. 422; Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867*, 2nd edn. (1979), p. 231.

¹⁹ *House of Commons Journals*, 1828; MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 1 January 1828, 8 January 1828.

'In what sense are the *rights of Roman Catholics* stronger than those of *British-Born Negroes*? What degree of comparison is there between the *wrongs* inflicted on the former, and those inflicted on the latter? If there were a majority favourable to granting the former concessions, there is a majority, I apprehend, of the nation, ten times as large, in favour of granting the latter.'²⁰

In February 1829, the Duke of Wellington's government announced that it was intent on repealing the religious tests, effectively securing the bill's safe passage through Parliament. In the same month, the London Committee attempted to obtain 'the highly important point' of direct government interference in the chartered colonies and thus backed a motion to secure the admission of slave testimony over one to free slave children.²¹ As a result, the London abolitionists were once again steered into inactivity. At the beginning of June, they heard that Murray and Peel planned a reformation of the Colonial Courts and it was also understood that the government favoured and desired the equalisation of the duties on East and West Indian trade. The Committee therefore felt that these measures were 'sufficient to warrant a delay of farther proceedings on the part of the Anti-Slavery Society till next session.' For eleven months after April 1829, the abolitionists negotiated with Sir George Murray while no equalisation came. Thus, in the summer of 1829 the London Anti-Slavery Society capitulated to the government as it had in 1823-24 and in direct opposition to the progressive movement in the country.²²

However, it was during this period of protracted inactivity that dissenting religious bodies, who had concluded their repeal campaign, began to mobilise in favour of slave emancipation. The Methodists quickly emerged at the abolitionists' side: the Wesleyan Conference of July 1829 urged all Methodists to support anti-slavery petitions to Parliament for the mitigation and utter extinction of slavery should they be called for.²³ Meanwhile, Yorkshire abolitionism received a significant boost with the formation of a Leeds-based non-conformist abolition society, separate from the local auxiliary. The Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters' Association for the Abolition of Slavery, which was founded in September 1829, was supported by six Independent and Baptist chapels in the town. Its chairman, John Clapham, was a member of Queen Street chapel, the largest Independent church in the West Riding at the time.²⁴ Each chapel sent their own minister and two or more individuals from their congregation to

²⁰ Samuel Roberts, *Slavery - Its Evils and Remedy*, 2nd edn. (Sheffield, 1829).

²¹ Brougham was approached to bring in the subject of slave testimony, Buxton the problems of Mauritius and Lushington to move the issue of the free coloured population in the colonies. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 3 February 1829, 10 February 1829, 17 February 1829.

²² See chapter 8 on the progressive movement in the country.

²³ Anstey, *op.cit.*, p. 213.

²⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 28 June 1826, 10 May 1828.

the dissenters' committee to act as members.²⁵ It is significant that none of the Methodists chapels in Leeds were included in the list of participating congregations: while Baptists and Independents generally favoured the full repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, the Wesleyan ministers of Leeds had played a prominent part in the campaign against Catholic emancipation in the early months of 1829.²⁶ More importantly, the Dissenters' Association, in contrast to the Leeds Anti-Slavery Society, advocated immediate abolition as a religious duty from its inception.

It was probably in consequence of these independent efforts to revive the anti-slavery question, and criticism from the country, that the London Society's patience with the government began to dissipate. In the winter of 1829-30, plans were made to revive the cause of slave children and to press on the ministry a list of government promises and failures.²⁷ In February 1830, the London Committee became well aware of the damage inflicted by the inactivity across the country at a meeting with Sir George Murray. The West Indians had succeeded in convincing the Colonial Secretary that the abolitionist silence of the preceding years indicated that public enthusiasm for emancipation had dwindled and that the populace was now prepared to entertain more 'sober views' on the subject. The members of the abolitionist deputation reported to the parent committee that 'whatever may be Sir George Murray's personal feelings and opinions on the subject, the determination of the Ministry at present is *to do nothing*; and that if left to Government and the Colonial Legislatures, West India Slavery may exist, with little mitigation, for ages yet to come.'²⁸ In the next few weeks, the London Society's zeal increased and plans were made for raising the spirits of abolitionists across the country. The London Society began to show cognisance of provincial developments in the *Monthly Reporter*.²⁹ The fifty-eighth issue of the *Reporter* featured accounts of a recent meeting in Hull and the formation of the Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters Association six months previously.³⁰ Non-conformist

²⁵ Reverend Messrs. Scales and Hamilton, both Independent ministers, had also spoken at previous anti-slavery meetings in the town. Anon., handbill begins: 'At a Meeting of Friends to the Abolition of Negro Slavery, held in Leeds, on Monday, September 28th, 1829...' (Leeds, 1829).

²⁶ Only with the appointment in 1830 of a new Methodist minister in the town, Reverend Anderson, were the Leeds Wesleyans brought into the Association.

²⁷ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 25 November 1829, 1 December 1829.

²⁸ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3, 9 February 1830. The quote is from George Murray, reprinted in the minute books in a report on a recent meeting between him and the abolitionists. Reports of meetings with Murray are contained in the entries between 14 April 1829 and 9 February 1830.

²⁹ It was probably in response to their meeting with Murray earlier in the month that a petition from Cork, which had been raised in the previous September, was presented to the Commons. Although meetings in Dublin and Cork had been reported, they were presented merely as examples of Ireland's developing passion for the cause.

³⁰ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 53 (October 1829); No. 58 (March 1830).

denominations in London and in the localities called on the Anti-Slavery Society to revive while promising their support.

CONGREGATIONAL PETITIONING

While the London Society grew steadily more impatient with government inactivity, efforts to revive the cause were already underway among provincial supporters. In the autumn of 1829, the Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters Association distributed its appeals to the ministers of non-conformist congregations throughout the country. At the first annual meeting of the Hanley and Shelton Society, in January 1830, petitions were raised to protest against the lack of activity in the previous session. In February they were joined by the Hull and East Riding Association who held a meeting to encourage a revival of popular activity in the area.³¹ In response to this activity, a meeting was held in Bradford in April to raise petitions for total and unconditional emancipation and to encourage electors to support only parliamentary candidates favourable to abolition.³² It was also in the early months of 1830 that Rev. Benjamin Godwin, a Baptist minister from Bradford, undertook an influential abolitionist lecture tour throughout Yorkshire. These endeavours contributed to reviving the abolitionist cause to a large extent: eighty-eight petitions were received by the House of Commons between February and July 1830.³³ Five petitions were sent from the Potteries. Bradford and the neighbouring area raised ten separate petitions, while three petitions were received from Kingston upon Hull. The number of petitions raised by the Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters' society can reasonably be estimated in excess of forty separate petitions, excluding those from Bradford and Hull. This short period of activity shows that popular feeling preceded the London Committee and the capacity of religious bodies to raise numerous petitions.

Stirred from its inactivity by local example, the Anti-Slavery Society encouraged the renewal of petitions at the general meeting of May 1830. Each Christian congregation was asked to send its own petition to the Commons. In previous years, denominational

³¹ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 58 (March 1830); No. 60 (May 1830).

³² Their resolutions were adopted by numerous townships within the parish of Bradford which, according to Clarkson, had a population of 52,954 souls. *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 61 (May 1830); Thomas Clarkson, *A Letter to the Friends of the Slaves on the New Order of Council, and on the necessity of new measures on their behalf* (1830), p. 19.

³³ Lyndhurst, the Tory Lord Chancellor, 1827-30, said that before July 1830 'the cry was all over the country for negro emancipation' but after the news of the revolution in France the appeal changed for reform. This view of the importance of the July Revolution during the reform agitation is not supported by M. Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (1973), p. 102.

petitioning had not played a significant role. The United Associate Secession Church, a Scottish dissenting denomination, organised the largest number of dissenting petitions from congregations in the campaigns of 1823 and 1824 but these still represented a small percentage.³⁴ Numerous Protestant dissenting congregations across Britain also participated in these and the later petition campaigns of 1826 and 1828 although they do not appear to have co-ordinated their activity. Agitation for the repeal of the religious tests, however, provided an example for future success: in March 1828, Joseph Sturge suggested that the quickest way of getting a large number of petitions would be to appeal to individual religious congregations throughout the country: 'This plan appears to have been partly adopted in relation to the Test and Corporation Acts.'³⁵ When the abolitionist campaign was revived in the north in the early months of 1830, the Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters' Association demonstrated the success of applying congregational appeals to the abolitionist cause. At the general meeting in May, and in the subsequent circular address to the Society's country correspondents, the London Society asked that petitioning for the new session be 'extended to parishes, villages, hamlets, and especially to every Christian congregation.'³⁶

The London Society's efforts were immediately supported by the central bodies of non-conformist denominations. The Dissenting Deputies issued an appeal to their members in May and organised a petition which was presented to the Commons in June.³⁷ The Synod of the Associate Secession Church of Scotland also the support of its three hundred congregations in May and promoted petitions from September.³⁸ Following their lead, the Church of Scotland also joined the cause. The Synods of Merse and Teviotdale, and Lothian and Tweeddale, and the Presbyteries of Edinburgh, Paisley and Selkirk advocated petitioning in the autumn of 1830.³⁹ In October, the Yorkshire Dissenters' Association quickly issued an appeal across the county for the raising and transmission of congregational petitions. As 'the usages of Parliament allow Petitions from the same persons when they address it in different capacities,' dissenting ministers and their congregations were urged to sign town petitions which they felt considered slavery as a matter of policy and humanity, and congregational

³⁴ Details of the merger are noted in Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. II, pp. 24-25.

³⁵ MSS Letters relating to the Anti-Slavery Movement, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Brit. Emp S 18, C 1/60: Letter from Joseph Sturge to Pringle, 20 March 1828.

³⁶ Anti-Slavery Society circular, dated June 24, 1830. A sub-committee was appointed in May to undertake the task. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 18 May 1830.

³⁷ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 1 June 1830; *House of Commons Journals*, 11 June 1830.

³⁸ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 61, June 1830; *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 74, 5 January 1831, p. 29.

³⁹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 74, 5 January 1831, p. 37 and p. 39.

petitions which condemned slavery as an unchristian evil, 'condemned by its laws and precepts.'⁴⁰ In the same month, a Baptist minister in Truro appealed to all religious denominations to raise congregational petitions for the immediate abolition of slavery: the *Baptist Magazine* and the Anglican evangelical periodical *Record* also appealed for congregational and female petitioning.⁴¹ The London Society also appealed to the Catholics of Britain and Ireland who they hoped would 'shew their gratitude for the success of their recent efforts, in achieving their own liberation from restraint, by aiding to break the oppressive yoke which weighs down our negro fellow-subjects.'⁴² The repeal campaign provided an impetus to congregational petitioning.

Thus non-conformists became more prominent than before in the organisation of abolitionist activity at the grass-roots level. Anti-slavery mobilisation in the Potteries reveals their importance in the campaign. The Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society, which drew on the support of local porcelain manufacturers, admitted the resident ministers of the townships of Hanley and Shelton and the neighbouring communities of Burslem, Lane End, and Newcastle-under-Lyme to their committee without the need to be elected.⁴³ As in many places, the auxiliary drew on pre-existing agencies of religious co-operation. Members of the local Tract Society, which included several members of the anti-slavery committee, were invited to attend the general meeting of the abolition society. Indeed, the cross-over was of sufficient magnitude that two important meetings of the Hanley and Shelton auxiliary were delayed as they clashed with meetings of the Tract Society.⁴⁴ An unfortunate clash with a meeting of the Bible Society auxiliary in Bedford sapped the attendance at a lecture given by one of the hired agents.⁴⁵

The Hanley and Shelton Society also made concerted efforts to add other ministers to their committee. The London Society's 1828 address to religious ministers was distributed again in September 1830 on the eve of renewed petitioning: one member of the committee took advantage of the consecration of Stoke Church to hand copies

⁴⁰ Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters' Association for the Abolition of Slavery circular detailing form of petition (Leeds, 22 October 1830).

⁴¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 69 (20 October 1830); Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 64-65.

⁴² *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 61 (June 1830).

⁴³ The pottery magnates included the Wedgwoods, Ridgways, Minton and Spode. Herbert Minton produced anti-slavery china for the Female Society of Birmingham. For members see MSS Minute Book of Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society, Hanley Library, Staffordshire: 1 January 1829 and 10 July 1829 (containing rules of the committee).

⁴⁴ MSS Minute Book of Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 30 December 1829, 4 January 1831. They were one quarterly and one annual general meeting.

⁴⁵ Agency Committee, *Report of the Agency Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society, established in June 1831, for the purpose of disseminating information by lectures on Colonial Slavery* (1832), p. 11.

of the handbill to the clergy in attendance.⁴⁶ Similar efforts were made by other local committees during the final campaign. The Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society made a concerted effort to recruit 'conscientious ministers of the Gospel to the cause.' The report of the society of 9 October 1832 bore a more religious character than in previous years and stressed moral and religious duty. In the days following, Mary Ann Rawson contacted James Montgomery for a list of Methodist ministers in Sheffield so that she could contact their wives and encourage them to join her committee.⁴⁷

The organisation of grass-roots activity through the network of dissenting chapels provided local societies with a wide captive audience. Notices for the general meetings and petitions of the Hanley and Shelton society were read out in the chapels of the townships. Hume's lectures for the Agency Society were also advertised from 'the pulpits of different dissenting chapels.'⁴⁸ Copies of the *Monthly Reporter* were deposited in the local chapel libraries for the general congregation.⁴⁹ Chapels and non-conformist school rooms were also widely used for public meetings.⁵⁰ The Morpeth meeting of 1st November 1830 was held at the Independent chapel and the resulting petition was left for signatures 'on the Sunday following at the Catholic chapel in the morning, the Methodist chapel in the afternoon, and the Independent chapel in the evening.' Amongst the signatories were 'the rector of Bothalt and other clergymen of the established church, the Catholic clergyman and the ministers of the Presbyterian, independent and Methodist congregations of this town, so that the cause has been espoused by every religious denomination resident here.' A letter to Grey, who was to present the petition to the Lords, made it clear that 'although the meeting was held at a dissenting meeting house, yet it has not been confined to any sect or party.'⁵¹ Two Independent ministers toured Merioneth and Monmouthshire in the first months of 1833 and raised at least five petitions from the area.⁵²

⁴⁶ MSS Minutes of Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 28 September 1830.

⁴⁷ Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, *Report of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, delivered on Tuesday, October 9 1832* (Sheffield, 1832); MSS Samuel Roberts Letters, Sheffield Archives: No. 110: James Montgomery to Mary Ann Rawson, 18 October 1832.

⁴⁸ MSS Minute Book of Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 30 December 1829, 27 December 1831, 20 September 1832.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1829, 3 April 1832.

⁵⁰ George Thompson, the Methodist preacher, hoped to lecture 'chiefly to the religious public' over the winter months at their chapels and the large school rooms connected to them which were often the only buildings available which could hold such large meetings. Agency Committee, *Report*, p. 16.

⁵¹ Northumberland Record Office. ZAN M16/B4 p79. Copy documents re. anti-slavery meetings in Morpeth, 1830, pp. 1-5 and p. 23.

⁵² Gwynne E. Owen, 'Welsh Anti-Slavery Sentiments, 1780-1865: a survey of public opinion,' MA thesis, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (1964), p. 66.

The result of these national and local endeavours was a remarkable incidence and number of congregational petitions in the nationwide petition campaigns of 1830-31 and 1833. Buxton noted that a staggering 2,200 of the total of 2,600 petitions presented to Parliament in November and December 1830 were raised by non-conformist congregations.⁵³ Some of these petitions demanded precise religious reforms but most followed the London Society's example and appealed for the 'early and utter' extinction of slavery.⁵⁴ According to Drescher, petitions from dissenting congregations accounted for 70% of English confessional anti-slavery petitions in 1830-31 and 56% in 1833.⁵⁵ If these figures are correct, then Ireland, Scotland and Wales must have sent proportionally more congregational petitions than their English counterparts, indicating that religious mobilisation was a more effective method of raising petitions in these countries than the traditional organisation of local auxiliaries.⁵⁶

We can get a sense of the importance of congregational petitioning more generally if we return to the example of the north Staffordshire abolitionists. In Hanley and Shelton, the percentages for congregational petitioning were higher than Drescher's estimates for English petitions: 87% in the 1830-31 campaign and 93% in the final year. The participating chapels of the Potteries in these years rose from fourteen in the first year (1830) to twenty-one in the second (1831) and to twenty-nine in the final year of campaigning (1833). In total, over forty congregations organised petitions from the area and there was a high incidence of repeat petitioning whereas only three or four inhabitants petitions were raised each year and only two townships renewed them. However, congregational petitions were signed by considerably fewer people than those from the general inhabitants: in 1832 the inhabitants of Hanley and Shelton raised a petition in excess of 3,000 signatures while signatures from congregations ranged between 300 among the Methodists congregations of the largest town to a mere sixteen signatures from the smallest isolated village. In 1830, religious petitions averaged 105 signatures but this figure had fallen to 80 signatures by 1833. This

⁵³ Brock, *The Great Reform Act*, p. 81.

⁵⁴ The Protestant Dissenters of Ipswich, for example, demanded measures for promoting Sunday as the day of rest and allowing freedom of worship; the Independents of Salem Chapel in Leeds demanded similar measures. These reforms may have been urged following news of the failings of the consolidated Order in Council of February 1830 which highlighted the opposition to religious worship. *House of Commons Journals*, 16 June 1830, 20 July 1830; *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 58, March 1830; Thomas Clarkson, *A Letter to the Friends of the Slaves on the New Order of Council, and on the necessity of new measures on their behalf* (1830).

⁵⁵ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery - British Mobilisation in Comparative Perspective* (1986), table 6.1 on p. 127.

⁵⁶ This conclusion would appear to be confirmed by Clarkson's account of his tour in Wales and his dependence on ministers, and by the previous example of Secessionist Church petitioning in 1823-24 which accounted for a large portion of the petitions presented from Scotland.

decline can be accounted for by the move from denominational petitioning to individual chapel petitioning: for example, the Methodists of Hanley petitioned as a group in 1830 but in 1833 they sent petitions from each of their own chapels. Though the average number of signatures fell, it is worth remembering that the London Anti-Slavery Society was principally interested in the number of petitions raised.⁵⁷

Though numerically smaller, congregational petitions had a wider geographical and social reach than inhabitants petitions. While the latter came from areas less than four miles away, petitions from chapels were raised over ten miles to the south and eight miles to the west of Hanley. As a result, congregational petitions reached further into the countryside to mobilise rural support, an effect also illustrated in the congregational petitions raised from rural Wales and Scotland. Furthermore, Drescher has suggested that the 'extraordinarily complete signing-up' of the Wesleyan Methodists allows us to form a picture of the social composition of abolitionist support.⁵⁸ Of the 241,000 Wesleyan Methodists in 1833, 229,426 are believed to have signed abolitionists petitions: this gives us a figure of Wesleyan support for abolition in excess of 95%.⁵⁹ This percentage is almost certainly too high as the number of Wesleyan Methodists has been conservatively estimated.⁶⁰ Methodists and other non-conformists were encouraged to sign multiple petitions, perhaps including those raised by other congregations of their denomination, which would further skew the figures. There are also the complicating factor of infrequent or irregular attendance to be taken into account. Nevertheless, accepting that this percentage may be reduced, the artisan base of Methodism is still well represented in a social profile of abolitionist Wesleyan signers. Moreover, there is certainly evidence that Methodist congregations canvassed the labouring population for their support: the Wesleyans and the New Connexion at Etruria, the site of Josiah Wedgwood's factory, both raised chapel petitions in 1833. Religious mobilisation appears to have expanded the penetration of abolitionist ideas throughout British society.

PARLIAMENTARY PLEDGES

⁵⁷ MSS Minute books of Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: entries for 1830, 1831 and 1833.

⁵⁸ Drescher, *op.cit.*, pp. 128-130.

⁵⁹ Seymour Drescher, 'Two variants of anti-slavery: religious organisation and social mobilisation in Britain and France, 1780-1870,' in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform* (Kent, Connecticut, 1980), table 2, p. 48.

⁶⁰ David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (1984), p. 12.

One of the most important features of mass abolitionist activity in the provincial campaigns of 1830-33 was the canvass for parliamentary pledges. Abolitionists at the national and local levels urged freeholders to give their votes only to candidates who would commit themselves to vote for speedy measures. This necessitated simultaneous appeals to the electorate and parliamentary candidates at a time of great political interest. Pledges was popularised by the Catholic Association, who had successfully orchestrated O'Connell's campaign at the County Clare by-election of 1828, although provincial abolitionists had used this tactic before.⁶¹ Soon pledges were absorbed into the undercurrent of British radicalism. Carlile and Taylor advocated the use of pledges in their appeals for reform in 1829, as did the provincial political unions from the beginning of 1830.⁶² The insistence on pledges reflected a widespread desire for greater accountability within the political system from which the abolitionists were not immune. Following the adoption of pledges, abolitionists could represent any Parliamentary intransigence as a betrayal of trust and a neglect of duty.⁶³

The election of July-August 1830 provided the abolitionists with their first opportunity to use pledging systematically. In May 1830, the London Committee, already active in the raising of petitions, issued an 'Address to the Electors and People of the United Kingdom.'⁶⁴ In July, auxiliary societies were requested to insert the address in provincial newspapers.⁶⁵ When the election was underway, the London Committee kept a book containing all the pledges given by candidates favourable to the abolition of slavery.⁶⁶ For the abolitionists, this was 'an occasion eminently fitting for the nation at large to vindicate its moral character, and publicly to testify its repudiation of this flagrant system of tyranny and injustice.'⁶⁷ Consequently, pledges were also endorsed by the newly mobilised non-conformist denominations equally intent on vindicating their 'moral character.' In May, the Dissenting Deputies in London issued resolutions to its members which appealed for petitions and offered all

⁶¹ See chapter 2 on the Manchester abolitionists and the Society of Friends in 1790 and chapter 5 on the Yorkshire elections of 1806 and 1807. The same tactic was used throughout the 1820s though sporadically. For example, see Northumberland Record Office. Handbill entitled 'Mr. Bell and Slavery' by Las Casas. NRO 3948/65.

⁶² Edward Royle and James Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers, 1760-1848* (1982), p. 141.

⁶³ *Doncaster Gazette*, 8 October 1830.

⁶⁴ Dr. Stephen Lushington spoke passionately to the electors of Britain of their 'sacred duty': 'Let them give their vote to no lukewarm friend - to no stickler about indemnities - to no putter-off of the question to a day that was never to come.' *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 61 (June 1830). MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 8 June 1830, 7 July 1830; *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 62 (July 1830).

⁶⁵ MSS Minute book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 28 September 1830.

⁶⁶ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 4 August 1830.

⁶⁷ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 62.

assistance to the Anti-Slavery Society.⁶⁸ At the end of July, Richard Watson moved the Methodist Conference to encourage its members to 'give their influence and votes' only to abolitionist candidates.⁶⁹ The conversion of the Methodists to direct intervention was regarded as a matter of great significance by the London Society and was heralded as such in the *Reporter*. One local abolitionist urged that the issue containing the Methodist resolutions be circulated widely among the entire Wesleyan Connexion.⁷⁰ Thus, pledging was pressed on provincial committees by the London Committee and on dissenting congregations through denominational bodies.

Provincial abolitionists were willing to extract definitive pledges from parliamentary candidates when and where the opportunity existed.⁷¹ Nowhere was the 1830 contest more publicly fought on anti-slavery grounds than in Yorkshire where Henry Brougham was supported by the independent liberals of the West Riding. Though the election was part of the bitter ongoing rivalry between the squirearchy and the liberals, the contest was not without its abolitionist dimensions. News of Brougham's candidacy caused a flurry of anti-slavery activity across the county, while his nomination was received 'with a demonstration of union and cordiality which [seemed] to insure his return.'⁷² In Leeds, both the Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters' Association and the Leeds Anti-Slavery Society urged voters to support Brougham.⁷³ The Dissenters also reminded voters of their commitment to Wilberforce and their strong anti-slavery heritage.⁷⁴ In Scarborough and Whitby, the local auxiliaries also pledged their whole-hearted support for his election 'ON ANTI-SLAVERY GROUNDS': the Whitby Society issued 500 handbills urging pledges to the local freeholders.⁷⁵ Similar assurances came from Hull and York where a large public meeting in support of

⁶⁸ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 1 June 1830. Letter and resolutions from the Dissenting Deputies dated 28th May 1830.

⁶⁹ Anstey, *op.cit.*, p. 214; *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 65 (August 1830).

⁷⁰ As a result, the London Society made arrangements with the secretaries of the Wesleyan Mission House for the circulation of copies among 'the Ministers and most influential members of that body.' MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 1 September 1830.

⁷¹ The lack of a contest in Staffordshire and the borough of Newcastle under Lyme in 1831 prevented the Hanley and Shelton Society from introducing a member on anti-slavery principles. In September 1832, all three candidates refused to sign a pledge sent to them on grounds of constitutional principle but the Chairman (Josiah Wedgwood II, who was himself a candidate!) rested content that they were all friends to the measure. MSS Minute book of Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 6 July 1831, 20 September 1831.

⁷² *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 64 (1 August 1830).

⁷³ The Dissenters' Association further offered to give their most strenuous support to Brougham's election campaign 'by every constitutional means.' Edward Baines, editor of the *Leeds Mercury* and himself an abolitionist, firmly supported Brougham in his newspaper. *Leeds Mercury*, 24 July 1830, 31 July 1830.

⁷⁴ Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters' Association for the Abolition of Slavery circular, 'Yorkshire Election' (Leeds, 1830).

⁷⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, 31 July 1830.

Brougham was reported to be ‘the echo of the other divisions of the county.’⁷⁶ Anti-slavery societies across the country employed their time, energy and resources to promote the campaigns of individual candidates. Abolitionists in Bristol faced substantial debts when their candidate was defeated by the local West Indian.⁷⁷ Some may even have paid a higher price: the Bristol candidate’s committee rooms were stormed by his opponent’s supporters and fourteen people died.⁷⁸

It is unlikely that all abolitionists were willing to cast their votes purely out of humanitarian considerations. One voter stated that, though he wished to see slavery abolished, he would not give his vote to a Unitarian.⁷⁹ The radical connotations of eliciting pledges also concerned some. At a public meeting in Doncaster in October 1830, Robert Baxter, a member of the local committee, condemned the *Reporter* for ‘setting the people up against the rulers’ and drew a direct connection between Brougham’s success and that of O’Connell in Ireland by the same means. Though an anonymous abolitionist was quick to counter Baxter’s charges, both men agreed on the deplorable nature of ‘agitation.’ Nevertheless, the widespread adoption of pledges, and the perceived success of the measure in 1830, convinced one observer that ‘the cause at last had become the cause of the people,’ by whom he meant the ‘middle ranks’ of society.⁸⁰ The London Society called again for pledges during the elections of April-May 1831 and the first reformed election of December 1832. During the latter, the newly formed Agency Committee co-ordinated pledging nationwide.⁸¹

While some religious bodies had a long pedigree of voting only for pledged candidates,⁸² this intervention in political life may have caused angst for some religious activists. In 1832, the Board of Correspondence in London, ‘aware of the hesitation felt by a large portion of the religious public as to the propriety of their taking part in political matters,’ made it clear that the slavery question ‘is one strictly religious...’⁸³ Nevertheless, fears for the propriety of raising pledges receded following its first systematic use by the abolitionists. This may explain why the Methodists adopted a tactic tarred with the brush of catholic radicalism. Provincial dissenting

⁷⁶ *Hull Advertiser*, 30 July 1830; *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 64 (1 August 1830).

⁷⁷ A cautious appeal was made in the *Reporter* for financial aid to relieve the debt imposed on the Bristol humanitarians. *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 65 (20 August 1830).

⁷⁸ Brock, *op.cit.*, p. 101.

⁷⁹ *Hull Advertiser*, 26 October 1832

⁸⁰ *Doncaster Gazette*, 8 October 1830.

⁸¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 80 (9 May 1831); MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 5 October 1831; MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 21 November 1832.

⁸² The Baptists of Monmouthshire, for example. Gwynne E. Owen, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

⁸³ Resolution of the Board of Correspondence, reprinted in *Anti-Slavery Record*, No. 8 (1 December 1832).

denominations were consequently more prominent in organising pledges in 1832 than they had been in previous years. In October 1832, the Independent and Baptist ministers of six chapels in Hull united to issue an address on the upcoming election. It was earnestly recommended to that congregations:

‘guard vigilantly against being led astray by general Declarations or evasive Replies in reference to this Great Question; and steadfastly to Refuse their Votes to any Candidate, however plausible his Professions, who has not yet unequivocally pledged himself to use his utmost endeavours to procure, as an indispensable Measure, the IMMEDIATE EMANCIPATION of our enslaved fellow-subjects.’⁸⁴

Unsurprisingly, William Hutt, one of the candidates, issued a statement committing himself to ‘immediate and certain emancipation’ in the next issue of the *Hull Advertiser*.⁸⁵ The ‘Christian Ministers of Liverpool’ issued a similar address in November.⁸⁶ Religious groups in 1832 were often seen as prime-movers in the business of extracting pledges.⁸⁷ The Baptist missionary, William Knibb, issued his own address to ‘British Christians’ on pledges and petitioning through the pages of the *Tourist*.⁸⁸

Auxiliaries also found that their canvass entailed further duties. In particular, male auxiliaries were required to watch over their pledged candidates and to observe their conduct once elected. The Agency Society reminded abolitionists that they ‘must work in season and out of season, esteeming every hour as pregnant with consequences in which humanity is deeply interested.’⁸⁹ The Hull Anti-Slavery Committee, like many local auxiliaries, approached candidates directly to enquire of their position on the question and printed a report of their findings in the press.⁹⁰ The London Society also printed a list of MPs who voted for abolitionist motions to allow voters to discover if their candidate was true to his word.⁹¹ Abolitionists could be guaranteed to publicise any failure to uphold a promise: in July 1832, Charles Hamlyn Williams, the MP for Carmarthen, issued an address to his electors stating that, as he

⁸⁴ *Hull Advertiser*, 5 October 1832.

⁸⁵ *Hull Advertiser*, 12 October 1832.

⁸⁶ *Anti-Slavery Record*, No. 8 (1 December 1832).

⁸⁷ One commentator noted that ‘those respectable bodies, the Dissenters and Methodists, have taken every possible precaution to secure a candidate favourable to the immediate Abolition of Slavery,’ for which he applauded their motives and exertions. *Hull Advertiser*, 26 October 1832.

⁸⁸ *Tourist; or, Sketch Book of the Times*, No. 6 (12 October 1832).

⁸⁹ *Tourist*, No. 10 (19 November 1832).

⁹⁰ *Hull Advertiser*, 21 December 1832.

⁹¹ *Anti-Slavery Record*, No. 2, 1 June 1832.

now believed the slaves to be in a better condition to the labouring classes of Britain, he would not to stand for re-election.⁹² Pledges clearly had real political influence.

Moreover, pledges created a political dialogue between provincial abolitionists and members of Parliament, the advantages of which were not lost on the London Anti-Slavery Society or the Agency Committee. During the petition campaign of 1830-31, the London Society asked abolitionists to persuade their representatives to attend the Commons debates.⁹³ Furthermore, in the aftermath of the first reformed election, the Agency Committee asked local societies to press their MPs to write to Earl Grey or to meet ministers to demand that the government advocated total and immediate abolition only.⁹⁴ The canvassing and screening of candidates in the provinces reinforced the lobbying activities of the London committee and the campaign in Parliament.

The important point to be noted is that pledging was as much about the elector as the elected. In Bristol, many of the inhabitants signed a declaration which pledged them to vote only for abolitionist candidates. Following a West Indian counter-offensive, the *Reporter* boldly announced that a moral test of the people of Bristol would soon occur: 'The eye of Great Britain is upon them, and whether they succeed or not in their attempt, every extremity of her wide dominion must feel *the purifying and exalting influence* of such an example.'⁹⁵ Individuals as well as parliamentarians were held accountable by pledges. The Nottingham Anti-Slavery Association demanded that new electors do their duty: 'We call on you as men, as *Britons*, and as *Christians*, to prove it to the whole world that *your hands* are clean from a crime so *base and iniquitous*.'⁹⁶ In 1832, the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society distributed a printed pledge to be signed not by candidates but by *electors*:

'Declaration of the undersigned Electors against Colonial Slavery.

'We hereby declare that we will not vote for or support any person who is a candidate to represent this Borough or county in Parliament who will not pledge himself to support every just and efficient measure for the

⁹² Andrew Graham Dignum, *A Letter to the Rt. Hon. Earl of Suffield on a subject connected with Slavery in the Island of Jamaica* (1832). This pamphlet reprints Williams' address to the electors of Carmarthen.

⁹³ The same appeal was repeated some months later following the delay of Buxton's motion. MSS Minute book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 18 January 1831, 6 July 1831; MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 5 January 1831.

⁹⁴ MSS Minute book of Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 15 January 1833.

⁹⁵ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 64 (1 August 1830). Emphasis added.

⁹⁶ Nottingham Anti-Slavery Association, 'To the Electors of Nottingham' (Nottingham, 21 July 1830).

entire abolition of Colonial Slavery at the earliest period compatible with the safety of all classes.⁹⁷

Both individuals and members of parliament were condemned for breaking their pledge. Jabez Bunting, the Methodist 'Pope', was condemned for voting against the pledged Whig candidate although he had signed an address from the Christian ministers of Liverpool urging all electors to assist the abolitionists.⁹⁸ Davis suggested that immediatism became 'institutionalised as a rigid test of faith' and later 'defined standards of thought and conduct.'⁹⁹ This can be seen most clearly in the adoption of immediatist pledges from 1831 which came to represent personal testimony against sin.

THE AGENCY COMMITTEE

The Agency Committee has absorbed the attention of numerous scholars in their studies of the final public campaign against slavery. From its creation in June 1831 to the end of the emancipation campaign in 1833, the Agency Committee recruited and funded a number of itinerant lecturers who crossed the country to promote the formation of local auxiliaries and to raise support for the cause. According to Sir George Stephen, in his *Antislavery Recollections*, the Agency was formed as a consequence of a rift between the 'young England abolitionists' and the old anti-slavery vanguard. This new group adopted the radical step of employing 'stipendiary agents', canvassing parliamentary candidates for pledges and adopting immediate abolition as the only conscionable remedy for the evils of slavery.¹⁰⁰ Few historians now take Stephen's account at face value but the radicalism of the Agency and its discontinuity with the past remains an important aspect of historical thinking on the subject. In this section I will argue that the creation of the Agency Committee was a consequence of the Anti-Slavery Society's own mobilisation. The circular letters and regular communications of the London Committee with the auxiliaries across the country indicate that the Anti-Slavery Society had adopted more popular agitational techniques and principles earlier than we have previously thought. Moreover, I will contend that the London Anti-Slavery Society and the Agency sub-committee were heavily influenced by provincial examples: that abolitionists in the localities played a

⁹⁷ MSS Minute book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 4 July 1832.

⁹⁸ Anstey, *op.cit.*, p. 222.

⁹⁹ Davis, 'The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought,' *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, xlix, 2 (1962), p. 230.

¹⁰⁰ Sir George Stephen, *Antislavery Recollections* (1854).

significant role in setting the precedent for many of the popular exertions subsequently adopted by both organisations.

The formation of the Agency Committee at the meetings of 25th May and 1st June 1831 actually had its origin in committee meetings held exactly one year previously. In the days following the general meeting of May 1830,¹⁰¹ the London Society received a letter from George Stephen 'recommending energetic measures to the committee.' After some consideration, a sub-committee recommended the production of an occasional 'Sheet of Correspondence for popular evaluation, distinct from the Monthly Reporter,' and the employment of agents to visit existing auxiliaries and to aid the formation of new societies. This work was to be undertaken by a reinvigorated home correspondence sub-committee.¹⁰² The sub-committee also implied a growing commitment to denominational campaigning and immediatism: the General Meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society was fixed for the third week in May, when evangelical bodies regularly held their annual public meetings in the capital, and the society dropped the words 'mitigation and gradual' from its title to become 'The Society for the Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions.'¹⁰³ The report of the sub-committee in May 1830 proposed the prototype for the Agency Committee.

The use of agents and lecturers by local auxiliaries provided the London Society with their model of activity and, in some cases, experienced personnel. Cropper can be legitimately regarded as a formative influence on the employment of itinerant agents.¹⁰⁴ As the financier of Clarkson's tours in the early 1820s, and as a touring lecturer himself in 1824 and 1825, Cropper had convinced himself and others of the effectiveness of touring agents despite his initial reservations.¹⁰⁵ It was his tour which

¹⁰¹ The general meeting of the Society in mid-May 1830 approved of a plan for the emancipation of all children born in the West Indies after the start of the New Year but the measure was unlikely to satisfy abolitionists in the capital and the provinces who increasingly favoured immediate abolition. The measure was also too strong for Earl Grey who refused the office of vice-president of the Morpeth society on the grounds that he disagreed with the London society's proposed plan. Northumberland Record Office. ZAN M16/B4 p79. Copy documents re. anti-slavery meetings in Morpeth, 1830, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰² It was ordered to establish regular communication with provincial societies 'to bring them as far as possible into entire concert and co-operation with this Society.'

¹⁰³ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 25 May 1830, 1 June 1830. Report of the sub-committee, dated 27 May 1830, was adopted on 1 June 1830 and printed in the minutes for 8 June 1830; Anstey, *op.cit.*, p. 213.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, D. B. Davis's assessment of Cropper's contribution to the Agency committee in D. B. Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1823-33,' *Journal of Negro History* (1960), pp. 165-167.

¹⁰⁵ His tour of the Midlands and the north and west of England during the revival of petitioning in 1825-26 was the prototype for further activity. Letter from James Cropper, Liverpool, to Joseph Sturge, 30th November 1825, in Anne Cropper (ed.) *Extracts from letters of James Cropper, for his grand-children* (1850), p. 109.

probably convinced the London Committee, during the renewed campaign of 1828, that ‘much good might arise from the appearance at Public Meetings in the Country of individuals properly qualified to exhibit the real state of Slavery in our colonies.’¹⁰⁶ Ladies’ associations were also prominent in organising tours. In the autumn of 1828, Dr. Philip, the London Missionary Society’s principal agent at the Cape of Good Hope, toured Yorkshire and Northamptonshire to promote the formation of ladies’ associations. From April 1829, his efforts were funded by the Female Society for Birmingham.¹⁰⁷ In the following year, the Birmingham Ladies also funded two tours undertaken by Captain Charles Stuart for the Dublin-based Hibernian Negro’s Friend Society, the main Irish society which expressed a kinship with the outlook of ladies’ associations and an open hostility to the London leadership. Stuart’s tour raised the largest number of petitions to Parliament ever presented from Ireland. The Calne and Salisbury Ladies Association also provided the Hibernian Negro’s Friend Society with sufficient funds to employ Edward Baldwin as an agent in Wiltshire.¹⁰⁸

To these tours can be added the exertions of individuals who were duly credited by the London Society for their pioneering work. The Agency Committee dated its origins not from June 1831 but from 1830 when ‘a spirit of enquiry was awakened’ and ‘many gentlemen of acknowledged character and talents spontaneously came forward.’¹⁰⁹ Their allusions in their report to the important example of early lectures, the use of the pulpit and the ‘beneficial effects of these exertions... perceived by many observing members of the cause at a distance from the metropolis’ probably referred to the work of Rev. Benjamin Godwin. Godwin, a Baptist Minister in Bradford, gave a series of lectures at towns across Yorkshire in March-June 1830 and was subsequently invited to other towns. In May, a general description of his lectures was inserted in the *Reporter* to promote ‘similar exertions in other large towns.’¹¹⁰ In the autumn, these lectures were collected and printed by the London Committee and hailed as ‘a text book richly fraught with materials for those who may wish to emulate, in the same mode of benevolent exertion, the labours and success of this able and estimable minister of Christ.’¹¹¹ His example may have influenced the growth of provincial lecturers in the pre-Agency period: the *Reporter* recorded the lectures of

¹⁰⁶ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/2: 6 August 1828.

¹⁰⁷ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 50; MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 28 September 1828.

¹⁰⁸ Hibernian Negro’s Friend Society, *The Principles, Plans, and Objects of the Hibernian Negro’s Friend Society contrasted with those of the previously existing Anti-Slavery Societies in the form of a Letter to Thomas Pringle, secretary of the London Anti-Slavery Society* (Dublin, 1831).

¹⁰⁹ Agency Committee, *Report of the Agency Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society, established in June 1831, for the purpose of disseminating information by lectures on Colonial Slavery* (1832), p. 1.

¹¹⁰ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 61 (May 1830).

¹¹¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 67 (20 September 1830).

Rev. Marsh of Birmingham, W. J. Blair of Bristol and Daniel Sykes in the East Riding as well as the sermons of Reverend Messrs. Townshend, Marriott, Watson, Wilks and Andrew Thomson of Edinburgh during the petition campaign of 1830.¹¹² These endeavours provided the future Agency Committee with tried and tested agitational techniques and proof of their success: the 'Letter of Instructions' issued to the Society's agents in June 1831 held up Godwin's lectures as 'a general but accurately and well-written sketch of the whole subject, prepared in the very form which it seems proper for the agents generally to adopt.'¹¹³ By the summer of 1830, provincial abolitionists had provided demonstrable proof of the benefits of a system of itinerant agents.

The revived home correspondence committee was the immediate ancestor of the Agency Committee. The appeal for petitions in time for the new parliamentary session in October 1830 was the catalyst. George Stephen and others were asked by the London Society to divide the capital and the neighbouring area into districts for the purpose of convening meetings and procuring separate petitions. The London campaign of September 1830 introduced many members of the committee to lecturing.¹¹⁴ Petitioning across the country also demanded the close observation of the correspondence committee. In November 1830, the petitions sub-committee resigned its appointment and referred its work to the correspondence committee which had already 'devoted great attention' to the matter. By this time, the correspondence committee, in an attempt to contend with the increasing volume of committee business, met every other day and John Crisp, later the secretary of the Agency Anti-Slavery Society, had been hired by the Parent Committee to assist. The correspondence committee also helped to convene public meetings across the country.¹¹⁵ The organisation of lecturers began in earnest.¹¹⁶ Clearly, the formation of the Agency Committee was by no means the radical departure which George Stephen suggested.

¹¹² *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 67 (20 September 1830); No. 69 (20 October 1830); Blair's efforts are alluded to in MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 23 June 1830 - 16 September 1830 and his work at numerous meetings in the south-west in the autumn of 1830 was mentioned in *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 74 (5 January 1831), p. 58, *fn.*

¹¹³ 'Letter of Instructions' reprinted in Sir George Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections* (1854), p. 139 and E. Hurwitz, *Politics and the Public Conscience* (1973), pp. 128-131.

¹¹⁴ Stephen alluded to the London endeavours as important forerunners of the Agency Committee. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 16 September 1830; Sir George Stephen, *Recollections*, pp. 118-120.

¹¹⁵ George Stephen and Joseph Phillips each delivered public lectures. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 17 November 1830, 3 November 1830. One of Phillips's lectures, given at Reading, was reported in *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 74 (5 January 1831), pp. 48-49.

¹¹⁶ Richard Matthews arranged with the Wesleyan leadership for Rev. W. Thorpe to be excused from his present duties to allow him to be hired by the committee as a paid agent. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 5 October 1830, 17 November 1830.

The Anti-Slavery Society was not as resistant to 'agitation' or immediatism as Stephen attempted to show. Though Stephen represented pledges as an innovation of the Agency committee,¹¹⁷ the London Society had already endeavoured to secure pledges from candidates at the July-August 1830 election despite the radical connotation of such a move. More importantly there is abundant evidence to suggest that the Society had adopted an immediatist position *before* the petition campaign of October-November 1830 and thus several months before the advent of the Agency Committee. From the general meeting of 1830, the London Society came under increasing pressure to adopt immediatism. Historians have frequently asserted that Andrew Thomson's speech in Edinburgh on 19th October 1830 was the moment which forced the Anti-Slavery Society to change its position.¹¹⁸ Thomson called for immediate abolition at the 8th October public meeting and demanded that attempts to emancipate slave children alone cease. For the enemies of emancipation, he insisted, 'the *earliest practicable period* would always be in the future tense,' while the children clause implied that those born before a certain date could be legally held in bondage. Under pressure from the 'majority,' Thomson introduced his amendments and divided the meeting. A second, better attended meeting a few days later¹¹⁹ raised 22,000 signatures for an immediatist petition and a Ladies Society was formed.¹²⁰ Only 1,000 signed the gradualist petition. Thomson's speech on this occasion added fuel to the accusations made by the Hibernian Negro's Friend Society that the London Society's procrastination had undermined the moral and religious principles of anti-slavery. In particular, the Edinburgh society opposed the resolution passed in favour of emancipating slave children instead of immediate emancipation at the May general meeting.¹²¹

However, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the London Society had moved towards an immediatist position before Thomson's speech was given. In May 1830, the London Society's change of title indicated an appreciation of the mood in the country. By this time, James Stephen, the father of slave registration, had moved to

¹¹⁷ Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 162.

¹¹⁸ Davis, 'Immediatism,' p. 221; Midgley, *op.cit.*, p. 104 and p. 109.

¹¹⁹ The controversy of the first meeting evidently ensured a high turnout: *The Scotsman* reported that it was one of the largest and most respectable meetings held in the city. The second Edinburgh meeting consisted 'almost exclusively of the well-educated and most intelligent ranks of society' who numbered no less than 1,200. *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 74 (5 January 1831), pp. 31-32.

¹²⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 74 (5 January 1831), pp. 29-33.

¹²¹ Hibernian Negro's Friend Society, *The Principles, Plans, and Objects of the Hibernian Negro's Friend Society contrasted with those of the previously existing Anti-Slavery Societies in the form of a Letter to Thomas Pringle, secretary of the London Anti-Slavery Society* (Dublin, 1831).

the immediatist camp and viewed the question as a simple matter of moral duty.¹²² At the beginning of September, the *Reporter* asked that all petitions 'for the early and utter extinction of Slavery' would be received in time for the new session.¹²³ Over the next month and a half, the *Reporter* included several accounts of public meetings which favoured immediate abolition, some of which debated the relative merits of immediatism and gradualism in detail.¹²⁴ Most importantly, in a circular dated 1st October 1830 the Society gave its definition of

*'the entire Abolition of Colonial Slavery at the earliest possible period. No amelioration - no palliatives - can justify the continuance, under any form or modification, of an Evil which is fundamentally opposed to the spirit and letter of the Gospel, and utterly subversive of the rights of human nature, and the interests of human happiness.'*¹²⁵

This was followed a few weeks later in the *Reporter* by printed extracts from a circular issued by Edmund Clarke of Truro (dated 7th October) on the framing of petitions which argued forthrightly for immediatism.¹²⁶ The next issue hailed the appearance of the second volume of Stephen's *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies Delineated* which contained an appeal for nothing short of immediate emancipation.¹²⁷ If the Anti-Slavery Society intended to pursue a gradual emancipation, it made no attempts to disguise the mood in the country or that of an inner circle of abolitionists for immediatism. By the time of Thomson's speech, the London Committee, under pressure from the provinces, already favoured immediate abolition. Thus the Agency Committee was not the radical departure usually supposed.

The Agency Committee was formed in June 1831 following the 1830-31 petition campaign.¹²⁸ Despite raising 5,484 petitions between November 1830 and April 1831, the cause had not advanced in Parliament and there were signs that the reform agitation had left behind a lull in public activity. Even a celebrated appeal by Buxton on the steady decline of the slave population in mid-April failed to convince the Whig

¹²² Davis, 'Immediatism,' p. 221.

¹²³ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 66 (1 September 1830).

¹²⁴ The report of the Bridlington meeting noted that pledges for the immediate abolition of slavery were accepted but those for gradualist measures were opposed. Meetings for immediate abolition in York and Devizes were also recorded as was the opinion of one speaker at the latter that gradual abolition meant nothing less than perpetual slavery. *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 67 (20 September 1830); No. 68 (5 October 1830).

¹²⁵ MSS Wedgwood Collection on deposit at Keele University Archives. E32/24757: Circular from Anti-Slavery Society dated 1 October 1830.

¹²⁶ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 69 (20 October 1830).

¹²⁷ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 70 (10 November 1830).

¹²⁸ According to Sir George Stephen, the meetings of the Anti-Slavery Society in spring 1831 were 'many and sad.' Sir George Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 124.

government of the need to commit itself to decisive action.¹²⁹ New methods were required. At the general meeting of the Society on 23rd April, George Stephen, charged by 'parties officially connected with many of the Anti-Slavery Associations throughout the country,' successfully moved an avowal of immediatism. Lushington also renewed the appeal for pledges in advance of the May general election.¹³⁰ The two motions combined represented a significant call to arms. In the following weeks, a conference was held 'with friends from the Country respecting the employment of travelling agents' who unanimously approved a plan to employ stipendiary agents 'to promote the more general diffusion of correct information on the system of slavery in our Colonies throughout every class of the population.'¹³¹ On 1st June 1831, eighteen members were elected to the Agency sub-committee.

The Agency Committee lost no time in organising its activities. Within two weeks it had issued a statement to the press in which they appealed for agents:

'The Anti-Slavery Society having been informed by its Subscribers in the country, that much advantage has been derived from the system of Agency, partially adopted last summer, has resolved to carry it into operation on a more extensive and systematic principle, and to employ Agents to deliver Lectures explanatory of the nature and effects of Colonial Slavery in all the principal towns throughout the United Kingdom.'¹³²

Their announcement made a point of the role played by provincial abolitionists in the formation of the agency plan. In fact, at the meeting at which the members of the Agency Committee were appointed, the London Society read two letters from local auxiliaries offering their immediate and whole-hearted support for the measure. The Hibernian Negro's Friend Society, which had repeatedly attacked the London Society for its gradualism and inactivity in the preceding months, recommended Mr. Baldwin to the attention of the parent committee as a travelling agent. G. C. Ashmead, the secretary of the Bristol Anti-Slavery Association, also sent a letter on his auxiliary's behalf 'stating their willingness to do everything in their power to promote the system of Itinerary Agency.'¹³³ Following the publication of the Agency's appeal in the press, Rev. John Thorp offered his own services to the committee.¹³⁴ Furthermore, the accounts of the Agency Committee, and George Stephen's narrative, reveal the important financial contributions made by Joseph Sturge and the Cropper family to

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 80 (9 May 1831).

¹³¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 27 April 1831, 18 May 1831, 25 May 1831.

¹³² *Christian Advocate*, 13 June 1831, quoted in Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in early Victorian Britain* (1987), p. 53.

¹³³ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 1 June 1831.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15 June 1831, 29 June 1831.

the sub-committee's fund.¹³⁵ Provincial abolitionists provided the impetus, personnel and immediate financial support for the Agency Committee.

The work of the Agency Committee in the six months after its formation was not so radically different from the work undertaken by the London Anti-Slavery Society or by provincial abolitionists. However, the execution of that work was conducted more systematically and effectively than ever before. In the first case, the Agency Committee formulated a considerably simplified anti-slavery 'creed': 'that the system of Colonial Slavery is a crime in the sight of God, and ought to be immediately and for ever abolished.' This statement had to be unconditionally supported by prospective lecturers before they were hired as agents: even dissenting ministers who offered to lecture in their own areas free of charge were required to subject themselves to 'a strict adherence' to the principle as expressed in the Agency's 'Letter of Instruction' to its lecturers. By considering slavery to be 'a question of a religious character,' the agency lecturers 'placed the question in its proper light, throwing aside all party and political and hyper-religious feeling alike, and reducing the controversy to the simple point, that the state of slavery was criminal before God.'¹³⁶ By reducing the issue to a simple Christian appeal the Agency Committee sought to transcend temporal considerations and extol an uncompromising moral imperative.

The hiring of suitable lecturers was a serious consideration. Though there was no shortage of volunteers who would abide by the agency's 'creed', many did not have the requisite knowledge to address a public meeting convincingly or to revive committees and were consequently rejected.¹³⁷ Those individuals who were accepted became salaried lecturers, although many agents offered their services free of charge, notably Captain Stuart.¹³⁸ All were instructed to make a collection at the end of their public meetings to pay the committee's expenses. Tours were also co-ordinated more effectively than ever before. The south and west of England and the Midlands were divided into seven circuits to each of which an agent was assigned. Agents were instructed to lecture at each town or village on their route. It was usually the case that

¹³⁵ Agency Committee, *Report*, accounts; Stephen, *Recollections*, pp. 129-130.

¹³⁶ Stephen, *Recollections*, pp. 161-162. This mention of 'hyper-religious feeling' is significant. Stephen felt that the London Society had failed to recruit the 'respectable' Christian community at large by concentrating its efforts on the 'pious' instead: indeed, in his *Recollections*, he depreciated the work of one of the agents by noting 'the people are seldom gained over by sermons, and Stewart [*sic*] was too apt to sermonise on all occasions.' Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 144, p. 161.

¹³⁷ Stephen noted that another difficulty lay in finding men willing and able to undertake the associated duties of reviving and forming local societies, assisting new committees and obtaining access to the provincial press. Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 133-135.

¹³⁸ In the first six months, over three hundred pounds was spent in wages and over two hundred in travelling expenses. Agency Committee, *Report*, accounts.

more than one lecture was given and, if the attendance at the first was poor, later meetings drew increasingly large crowds.¹³⁹ In total 173 towns in the south and west of England were covered in the first six months alone.¹⁴⁰

The professionalism of the agents was bolstered by the business-like efficiency of the Agency Committee. To facilitate the work of the itinerant lecturers, the Agency Committee contacted the Society's provincial correspondents a few days in advance to organise public meetings.¹⁴¹ The decision of the committee to meet daily increased efficiency although it resulted in heavy casualties: fifteen members soon dropped away leaving George Stephen and the Quaker brothers, Emmanuel and Joseph Cooper, to conduct the increasing volume of business.¹⁴² Indeed, the Committee was fundamentally reliant on Quaker efforts. On Stephen's admission, the Coopers became the backbone of the Agency. Indeed, Cropper acted as an intermediary between the sub-committee and the parent society and separated the two societies' accounts in March 1832.¹⁴³ The Quakers also made substantial financial contributions.¹⁴⁴ The Agency Committee also paid special attention to contacting Quakers across the country in their attempts to prepare towns for agency lectures.¹⁴⁵

Anstey noted that 'it is hard to estimate the success of the Agency Committee's work and still harder to quantify it.'¹⁴⁶ If the Agency's intention was to court 'respectable' religious opinion and harness it to the cause, as Anstey supposed, then it is hard to distinguish their results from those of the Wesleyan Methodist conference or the London Anti-Slavery Society who worked to the same end.¹⁴⁷ A useful guide to the effectiveness of central exertions is the number of petitions received by the House of Commons following mobilisation but in the first year of the Agency Committee's existence (June 1831-May 1832) there was no popular appeal to the public for petitions. In fact, the sub-committee's agents did not advocate a particular activity for

¹³⁹ At Newport Pagnell, the agent was 'compelled to seek more extensive accommodation for the second lecture which was, last evening, delivered in the... Independent Chapel to double the number of hearers.' Agency Committee, *Report*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ Agency Committee, *Report*.

¹⁴¹ Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 153.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁴³ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 7 March 1832.

¹⁴⁴ Cropper and Sturge donated substantial amounts as individuals and the Society of Friends contributed £500 as a body in May 1832. Agency Committee, *Report*, accounts; Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 186.

¹⁴⁵ Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 153.

¹⁴⁶ Anstey, *op.cit.*, p. 217.

¹⁴⁷ In June and July, the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* and the annual conference reiterated their anti-slavery conviction and urged all their members to secure pledges from Parliamentary candidates. Anstey, *ibid.* At the same time, the London Society issued a circular address to the ministers of religion which was particularly targeted at the clergy of the Established Church. MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 29 June 1831.

local societies: their 'unceasing object' was to revive and 'combine the energies of all, and at the proper season to turn their concentrated influence to good account.'¹⁴⁸ Thus the agency committee's endeavours in its first year consisted of exciting attention to the cause and putting the country in a state of readiness, not to the raising of petitions or organisation of pledges with which it is usually associated.

One concrete result of the work of the society's agents was to alert the London Society to the flagging state of the cause in the country:

"The Antislavery Reporters," valuable as they were to all who had the cause at heart, were not read; they were reduced to waste paper, and sold as such in barrowfuls. In most places it was difficult to collect even an annual meeting, and "Am I not a man and a brother?" tracts, though published and disseminated in thousands, kindled no spark of fraternal sympathy. It was truly a case of suspended animation...'¹⁴⁹

Though written over twenty years after the event, Stephen's remembrance appears to bear some truth. From July, the London Society considered the means of establishing greater control over the press. One abortive endeavour was a proposed anti-slavery newspaper but there were insufficient abolitionists in the country willing to take copies regularly.¹⁵⁰ In November, the London Society began work on 'a popular abstract' of the *Reporter* 'for extensive circulations at a cheaper rate.'¹⁵¹ The first copy of the *Anti-Slavery Record* appeared in May, priced at one pence monthly.

The Agency committee lectures also managed to counter this torpor. Public lectures were events which drew large crowds. Difficulties were often encountered trying to find sufficiently large halls.¹⁵² Lectures attracted intense local interest: Baldwin believed that the 'unusually large demand' for the Saturday paper in Southampton was a consequence of the long report which it contained of his lectures.¹⁵³ Even in small villages, people flocked to attend the public meetings.¹⁵⁴ In a Lincolnshire village of 800 people, the public meeting was attended by 150 people, 'chiefly females,' who

¹⁴⁸ Agency Committee, *Report*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 124.

¹⁵⁰ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 7 September 1831.

¹⁵¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 3 November 1831. In February 1832, Pringle wrote to Josiah Wedgwood about the scheme: 'We have in contemplation a publication of a more popular description to be issued every two months, which without interfering with the Reporters, may perhaps suit such reaches as think the Reporters too dry.' Wedgwood collection on deposit at Keele University Archives. E32/24767: Letter from Pringle to Josiah Wedgwood dated 8 February 1832.

¹⁵² Agency Committee, *Report*, p. 18.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁴ At Hurstmontceaux, an agricultural parish of only 1,300 people, the public lecture was attended by 400 people and the agent was impressed by 'the strong excitement which now prevails.' *Ibid.*, p. 18.

subscribed to the Agency society at the end.¹⁵⁵ The agency tours fulfilled the London Society's desire to spread their cause into relatively untouched rural areas. Baldwin wrote from one such area that:

'great eagerness is manifested to obtain information on the system, and a decided hostility is felt to its endurance: at least I have found so in an agricultural county, which is always torpid on matters not directly and palpably affecting its own interests, and the population had less aptitude of apprehension and more tameness than the inhabitants of manufacturing districts.'

Thompson also found that the 'culpable apathy' of the English peasantry was a product of lack of knowledge and that, once corrected, these small parishes were subject to the same excitement on the issue as urban centres.¹⁵⁶

The very presence of agents forced local societies to meet to assist in the organisation of public lectures and provided an impetus to the creation of new auxiliaries. When Hume arrived in the Potteries in September 1832, the Hanley and Shelton Society arranged for the hire of three public halls, issued posting bills, used the *Staffordshire Mercury* and alerted the pulpits to publicise the lectures as widely as possible. The excitement was sufficient to form a local association in the small town of Burslem where the Hanley and Shelton Society had tried to form a branch for over two years.¹⁵⁷ These endeavours were not restricted to men's auxiliaries. One lecture was not given on a Saturday as it was 'an inconvenient day for families to attend public meetings.'¹⁵⁸ There is also a suggestion that agency lecturers did not merely encourage women to form their own associations and to petition Parliament but also to join their men-folk in committees of mixed gender.¹⁵⁹ Stephen estimated that in the course of a single year, the number of affiliated societies increased from 200 to 1,200 'and all were well disciplined, and eager for work.'¹⁶⁰ This is confirmed by events in the first half of 1832.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12 and p. 18.

¹⁵⁷ Only eight months before Hume's arrival, the committee had resigned itself to failure in this regard. MSS Minute book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 20 September 1832, 8 January 1833 (general meeting), 5 July 1830, 6 July 1831, 11 January 1832.

¹⁵⁸ Agency Committee, *Report*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁹ Baldwin recorded that at Biggleswade he had formed an auxiliary society 'the members of which are substantially men.' Agency Committee, *Report*, p. 11.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 158. Stephen's estimate changes from 1,300 on p. 158, to 1,200 on p. 161. Without the records of the Agency Committee, this is impossible to corroborate. However, the number of non-confessional petitions received in 1833 was in excess of 2,800, suggesting that these estimates are not unreasonable.

EMANCIPATION ACHIEVED: THE 1832-33 CAMPAIGN

The early months of 1832 held mixed promise for the abolitionists. While at one level emancipation campaign was able to feed off the popular excitement aroused by the reform of Parliament,¹⁶¹ the strength of reformism among abolitionists also diverted the movement's attention. The Hanley and Shelton Society 'found men's minds so taken up with the great question of Parliamentary Reform' that they had judged it best to let the session pass without raising petitions and 'wearying our friends in useless endeavours.'¹⁶² At the same time, early in 1832, Cropper and Sturge wrote a memorandum on the state of the cause to the London Committee in which they argued that 'nothing should be brought forward which is in any way likely to injure the Reform cause.'¹⁶³ Their worry, that abolitionist agitation might jeopardise the passage of the Reform Bill, was illustrative of a widely-held belief that parliamentary reform would open the floodgates to abolition. The final passage of the Reform Bill, while creating excitement and feeding interest in the cause, could not be interfered with. As a result, agitation was for a time suspended.

This suspension of activity came at a poor time for an insurrection in Jamaica during Christmas 1831 thrust some of the most emotive issues back on to the popular and political agenda.¹⁶⁴ Between July and November 1831, the white population of Jamaica held a series of noisy anti-abolitionist protest meetings which suggested to the slaves that their emancipation was imminent. By mid-December, many slaves were convinced that their freedom had been granted and that the planters had refused to carry out the government's wishes.¹⁶⁵ Shortly after Christmas, the plantations of western Jamaica erupted in organised rebellion. The damage quickly surpassed one million pounds. It was only a matter of time before the militias regained control but when they did the result was perhaps more significant than the insurrection itself. The rebellion had been led by mature male creole slaves, principally those who held positions of authority. Many were Baptists sectaries or deacons and Sam Sharpe, who

¹⁶¹ Baldwin noted at Olney: 'I am quite amazed to see the interest which our causes excites, seeing the intensity of feeling on the fate of the Reform Bill... I observe an ardour equal to political enthusiasm.' Agency Committee, *Report*, p. 11.

¹⁶² MSS Minute book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 11 January 1832.

¹⁶³ Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* (1864), p. 99.

¹⁶⁴ For summaries of the events of the Jamaican rebellion, on which this analysis is based, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains*, chapter 22 and Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries - the disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834*, chapter 6.

¹⁶⁵ The governor issued a proclamation on the 22nd December stating that the abolition bill had not been passed but it came too late. Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 295.

was quickly apprehended as the slave ringleader and executed, was a peripatetic Baptist preacher.¹⁶⁶ The connection to the missionaries sparked a wave of anti-sectarian violence initiated by the white population which was later organised into the Colonial Church Union by the Reverend George W. Bridges, an Anglican clergyman famed in England for his pro-slavery tract *A Voice from Jamaica* (1823). Once order had been restored, the island's missionaries were put on trial; meanwhile, the Colonial Church Union, and its branch organisations which had rapidly been founded, began the destruction of non-conformist chapels.¹⁶⁷ The incendiary violence and irreligious vigour of the CCU was drenched in anti-British sentiment and quickly united Jamaica's white ruling class.¹⁶⁸ By so doing, the horrors of the aftermath of the rebellion were laid squarely at the feet of the entire white population of Jamaica: none but the missionaries could be excused from the violence.

The 'Baptist War,' as it became known, caught the public imagination. News of the rebellion, though incomplete at first, was relayed more rapidly and completely than before as a consequence of the abolitionist debates.¹⁶⁹ Although the Anti-Slavery Society's reporting of the rebellion was incomplete and inaccurate, the newspapers of the following months endorsed their version of events.¹⁷⁰ The rebellion was significant for the abolitionists for a number of different reasons. Firstly, the rebellion proved that nothing short of immediate abolition could preserve and pacify the British West Indies.¹⁷¹

'Unless immediate measures are taken for the entire removal of this national crime, this Committee are of opinion that the mutual hostility now existing, between the slave and the slave-holder, will lead to such a termination of the system as will involve the oppressor and the oppressed in one common calamity.'¹⁷²

Immediate abolition was now represented as a measure necessary to counter internal threats to the empire.¹⁷³ Secondly, the judicious conduct of the slaves during the

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁶⁷ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 166.

¹⁶⁸ This anti-British sentiment had a longer pedigree. During the meetings of 1831, 'renunciations of the King's allegiance were distinctly threatened' according to the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 94 (March 1832).

¹⁶⁹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 316.

¹⁷⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 99 (1 August 1832).

¹⁷¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 94 (March 1832). Jamaica had a population of 330,000 slaves compared to the estimated total of 800,000 in the British colonies. Its effects could be expected in other islands.

¹⁷² MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 27 September 1832; *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 101 (October 1832).

¹⁷³ It is possible that the rebellion also suggested to government intransigents the results of a failure to accommodate popular demands. James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (1986), p. 164.

rebellion, in sharp contrast to the vengeance of the white population, suggested to many that the slaves were eminently fit for freedom. The Methodist missionary, Peter Duncan, made particular note in a speech to the 'friends of Christian missions' of the defence of the non-conformist chapels in Kingston by the free coloured population.¹⁷⁴ The re-interpretation of rebellions, which Heyrick had realised was necessary for the adoption of immediate abolition, was accomplished by the slaves in Jamaica in December 1831. Furthermore, the severity of the plantocracy's reprisals, which extended to members of the free coloured community, stood in sharp contrast to the infrequent incidents of direct violence committed against whites by the black population: in the course of the rebellion, only 14 whites died compared to 540 black slaves. O'Connell claimed that it had been 'the most humane insurrection recorded in the annals of negro history.'¹⁷⁵ Thirdly, the destruction of chapels by the Colonial Church Union revealed the utter untrustworthiness of the plantocracy and the impotency of any measures which relied on their co-operation.¹⁷⁶ As Craton noted, the Jamaican governor's dispatches gave the impression in Britain 'that the Jamaican plantocracy was a mangy and evil old lion licking its wounds with a snarl.'¹⁷⁷ By their actions, the white population removed the prop which had allowed successive government's to look to gradualist measures.

The most important consequence of the Jamaican rebellion for the abolition campaign was the effect it had on the religious public in Britain and especially the missionary societies. As Mary Turner has observed, the rebellion persuaded the missionaries to throw their lot in with the abolitionists. The aftermath merely confirmed the long-held belief that slavery and religious conversion were diametrically opposed. Now, in the days that followed the restoration of order in Jamaica, the Wesleyan Methodists and Baptists dispatched delegations to London to explain the root cause of the events to their respective missionary societies. The Methodist journal *Missionary Notices* had already abandoned its neutrality before they arrived. The Baptist Missionary Society was brought into the emancipation campaign following a call from Buxton¹⁷⁸ and the

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* See also Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 167.

¹⁷⁵ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 96 (May 1832).

¹⁷⁶ The Hanley and Shelton Society argued that 'the riotous destruction of Chapels by the Militia of Jamaica, in the presence of, if not under the orders, of their officers and magistrates prove[s] that the white inhabitants of Jamaica... are totally unfit to be trusted with making or carrying into execution such ameliorating laws as the government desires...' MSS Minute book of the Hanley and Shelton Anti-Slavery Society: 8 January 1833.

¹⁷⁷ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 312.

¹⁷⁸ 'The religious public of England had sent these men forward, and the religious public must fight their battles in this country. Either withdraw your missionaries directly, or insist that justice shall be done to them!' *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 96 (May 1832).

fiery speech of William Knibb, subsequently the most famous of the Jamaican missionaries, at the Baptist Missionary Society's general meeting in June 1832.¹⁷⁹

Between mid-1832 and mid-1833, the ties between the Anti-Slavery Society and the non-conformist sects were substantially reinforced.¹⁸⁰ The ever-expanding catalogue of persecution in Jamaica mobilised the religious public just as the anti-slavery societies renewed their appeal to the public. From August 1832 to February 1833, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* and the *Record* continued to report in detail the attacks on missionaries, black Christians and their chapels. On the 15th August, the 'Friends of Christian Missions' resolved to assist in the immediate abolition of slavery following the spirited speeches of the missionaries Knibb and Duncan who had witnessed the Jamaican rebellion. The printer of the speeches, S. Bagster, made his own efforts to aid the distribution of the pamphlets by charging the same price as was charged by the Religious Tract Society and the British and Foreign Temperance Society for their publications.¹⁸¹ With the start of the first reform elections in November, pressure from among the religious denominations increased. A deputation from the Dissenting Deputies descended on the Colonial Office to confront Goderich over 'the late outrages in Jamaica.' Meanwhile, a 'Board of Correspondence for the Abolition of Slavery' was created in London which urged all Christian ministers to assist in every way possible:

'Against this perversion of all order - this bold attempt to destroy whatever is dignified and ennobling in human character, it becomes every disciple of religion, and more especially its public teachers, to raise their protest.'¹⁸²

The desperate actions of the Jamaican whites, the support of the 'religious public', and the momentum of popular agitation throughout the country suggested that slavery's demise was imminent. Just as the Reform Bill received royal assent, the abolitionist lobby received the largest injection of popular outrage in its history.

The 'Baptist War' was the catalyst which revived abolitionist activity but also West Indian opposition. On 17th April 1832, Lord Harewood presented a petition from the

¹⁷⁹ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 171.

¹⁸⁰ Roger Anstey, 'The pattern of British abolitionism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,' in Bolt and Drescher (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁸¹ *Religious Persecution in Jamaica. Report of the Speeches of the Rev. Peter Duncan, Wesleyan Missionary, and the Rev. W. Knibb, Baptist Missionary, at a Public Meeting of the Friends of Christian Missions, held at Exeter-hall, August 15th 1832* (London, 1832); *Anti-Slavery Record*, No. 5 (1 September 1832).

¹⁸² Resolution of the Board of Correspondence, reprinted in *Anti-Slavery Record*, No. 8 (1 December 1832).

West Indians which demanded the appointments of a Lords select committee to examine the condition of the slave population in consequence of the Jamaican rebellion.¹⁸³ The committee's appointment caused a howl of protest: the *Anti-Slavery Record* did not mix its words when it accused the upper house of conspiring 'to postpone indefinitely all measures of relief to the slaves.'¹⁸⁴ In the next week, the London Society formed a sub-committee to fiercely oppose the calling of the Lords Committee and asked Buxton to call for a Commons committee to look into the best way of abolishing slavery in the colonies. A circular address protesting against the Lords Committee was printed as a petition and quickly rushed to the anti-slavery associations throughout the country with blank skins of parchment for its immediate signature.¹⁸⁵ At the general meeting in May, it was signed by the 3,000 people in attendance and George Stephen thanked the agents and correspondents of the society for their help in raising it.¹⁸⁶ Within a few days, the completed petition contained 135,346 names 'upon a roll of parchment extending upwards of a mile in length,' despite having been raised nationally in less than three weeks.¹⁸⁷ The Anti-Slavery Society could not doubt the readiness of provincial abolitionists to act.

Once the Reform Bill had passed the Lords, the London abolitionists were able to capitalise on the popular outcry which had built over the news from Jamaica. However, further problems appeared to stand in the way of the cause. In June, the Agency Committee seceded from the Anti-Slavery Society and became an independent national abolitionist body. The months before the split were marked by tensions between the London Society and the Agency Committee. In February, the Agency sub-committee was reprimanded for printing its first report without the prior approval of the London Society. In response, the Agency Committee requested that its funds be separated from those of the general society. The first sign of a difference of opinion came two weeks after the separation of finances when George Stephen submitted an address to the public to the London Society for approval which was rejected for being 'for the present inexpedient.' Another associated motion from the Agency Committee for a public meeting was also rejected.¹⁸⁸ It seems likely that the London Society and the Agency Committee disagreed over suspending agitation for the duration of the Reform Bill's enactment. George Stephen said later 'of the two, I

¹⁸³ *House of Lords Journals*, 1831-32: 17 April 1832.

¹⁸⁴ *Anti-Slavery Record*, No. 1 (1 May 1832).

¹⁸⁵ It was 'the most earnest request of the Committee that no exertions may be spared to obtain signatures to the said Petition.' MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 21 April 1832, 25 April 1832.

¹⁸⁶ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 96 (May 1832).

¹⁸⁷ *Anti-Slavery Record*, No. 2 (1 June 1832).

¹⁸⁸ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 22 February 1832, 7 March 1832, 20 March 1832.

cared more for emancipation than reform, and think it deserved the preference.’¹⁸⁹ Certainly, the Agency Committee was more active in the cause during the final stages of the Reform Bill than the parent committee: two of their agents, George Thompson and Joseph Philips, gave lectures on the 2nd May 1832 at the height of the Reform crisis.¹⁹⁰

The London Society’s apparent depreciation of efforts to raise the national voice during the reform agitation was highly detrimental in the situation that followed. In April 1832, there was dissension within the London Society over the proposed form of Buxton’s motion to Parliament. While the London Committee remained committed to immediate emancipation, it also approved a resolution ‘that after this present session of Parliament every child born in His Majesty’s Colonies shall be free.’ The resolution appears to have been designed to set a minimum target to be achieved during the session and was not the Society’s principal object.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, it seemed to imply support for measures which fell short of immediate emancipation. As a result, James Stephen senior wrote a letter to the London Committee in which he argued that:

‘the faithful friends of the slaves should be careful to uphold the moral, in other words the religious, strength of our cause by not surrendering or compromising, *or seeming to do so*, the plain simple and clear demands of humanity, and justice.’¹⁹²

This moral simplicity was the basic principle expounded in the Agency’s ‘Letter of Instructions.’

The catalyst for the separation was perhaps an incident a few days before the general meeting which was recorded in both the London Society minutes and by George Stephen in his *Antislavery Recollections*. In May, the West Indians pasted the walls of the metropolis with bill-posters directed against the abolitionists. George Stephen ‘at once saw the advantage of it, as groups were collected round them, spelling them out, though they were a class that probably never opened a book once a year.’ Quickly, he wrote two or three placards and arranged for them to be posted over those of the West Indians by ‘a little army of bill-stickers, who entered heartily into the fun of the thing, and contrived to follow the West Indian bill-stickers unperceived, and veil over all

¹⁸⁹ Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 184.

¹⁹⁰ *Hull Advertiser*, 4 May 1832.

¹⁹¹ This makes sense of an entry in the minute books one month later in which the London Committee rejected a resolution that the freeing of slave children should be ‘a first step.’ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 9 May 1832. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁹² MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 11 April 1832. Letter from James Stephen and Mr. Garratt to the General Committee. Emphasis added.

their bills before morning.' By Stephen's own admission, his anti-slavery placards 'were villainous productions,' 'incendiary and seditious' by contemporary standards.' He even equated them with treason. Unsurprisingly, the posters excited the displeasure of Earl Grey who demanded that the name of the author be revealed by Bagster, the printer of the posters and then the Anti-Slavery Society's chief publisher.¹⁹³ At a meeting of the London Society on 9th May, Buxton formally disapproved of the placards and their anonymous author but, according to Stephen's account of the same meeting, all those in attendance knew Stephen had been the culprit and the matter was diffused with laughter.¹⁹⁴ At the general meeting, three days later, Buxton disavowed the placards once more and insisted that they had not originated with the Society or the Agency sub-committee.¹⁹⁵ However, difficulties over the expense of the posters, which came to £500, was not diffused so easily: the sum was later covertly provided by the Society of Friends who had formally discountenanced the poster campaign.¹⁹⁶ This matter could not have come at a worse time as the London Society faced severe financial difficulties.¹⁹⁷ At the next meeting of the London Committee, it was agreed that the 'constitution and proceedings' of the Agency sub-committee would be taken into consideration at a future date. Significantly, it was also resolved 'that no person employed by the Committee be allowed to issue any documents from their office that have not been sanctioned by the Committee.' The only contentious documents recently issued were the embarrassing posters.¹⁹⁸ On 8 June 1832, the Agency sub-committee asserted its right to independent action and seceded from the London Committee to form the Agency Anti-Slavery Society.¹⁹⁹

At the most crucial moment in the abolitionist movement's history, there existed two national and competing anti-slavery societies.²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the significance of the secession of the Agency Committee from the London Society in June 1832 has perhaps been exaggerated. At the moment of its secession the Agency Committee,

¹⁹³ Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 184.

¹⁹⁴ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 9 May 1832; Stephen, *Recollections*, pp. 185-186.

¹⁹⁵ *Anti-Slavery Recorder*, No. 96 (May 1832).

¹⁹⁶ Stephen, *Recollections*, pp. 186-187.

¹⁹⁷ A hint of this is recorded in the minutes for 18 and 25 July 1832. Joseph Ivimey's appeal for expenses led to concern over the donation of £500 to the Agency Committee from the Quakers and the purpose for which it was used.

¹⁹⁸ For full details of the placards dilemma see MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 9 May 1832, 12 May 1832; Stephen, *Recollections*, pp. 183-187; *Anti-Slavery Recorder*, No. 96 (May 1832).

¹⁹⁹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 4 July 1832. The resolutions of the Agency sub-committee of 8 June 1832 were transcribed in this minute.

²⁰⁰ Temperley has shown that Stephen's account of a difference of opinion between the Agency and Anti-Slavery Societies was confirmed by contemporaries. H. Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (1972), p. 16 *fn* 38.

although clearly ‘more radically inclined,’²⁰¹ expressed its ‘desire at all times to act in harmony with the other committee.’²⁰² The Agency Society even hired rooms at 18 Aldermanbury, the offices of the Anti-Slavery Society, though they were accessed by separate doors. In the months following their separation, the Anti-Slavery and Agency Societies combined their efforts to energise popular pressure, although the path of co-operation did not always run smooth. Following repeated attacks on the Agency Society in the press, the Anti-Slavery Society was keen to maintain its distance and thus refused to allow carriage of Agency Society pamphlets within their parcels.²⁰³ But, the differences between the societies were vastly outweighed by their combined work for the cause. The general meeting of the London Society, which took place amid the May Crisis when Wellington attempted to form a government, marked the first step towards renewed agitation. The appeal made by Rev. Burnett for the renewal of pledges was adopted in an Anti-Slavery Society circular in July. The Agency Society asked abolitionists to question their candidates and to “Bind them hand and foot” to pledges, a phrase which became the motto of the Agency Society.²⁰⁴ In November, they supplied local societies with a question to put to candidates and were asked to notify the committee of the responses.²⁰⁵ Meanwhile, in September, the London Committee called on all auxiliaries to hold public meetings to petition Parliament and asked the Agency Society to inform its lecturers of their intentions.²⁰⁶ The London Society also organised its own lecturers: Burnett and Hathaway spoke at Colchester, Godwin at Doncaster, and Thorowgood lectured at Uxbridge.²⁰⁷ In the final months of 1832, the two societies’ separate endeavours were mutually reinforced.

There is no denying that the reform election of December 1832 focused the minds of abolitionists. ‘If this opportunity be lost,’ noted a committee of London dissenters in a nationwide address, ‘years may elapse before another occurs, and the present awakened feeling of the country will, in the mean while, be in great danger of subsiding.’²⁰⁸ The abolitionists saw their hopes rest on the election: despite promising

²⁰¹ Anstey, ‘Patterns of abolitionism,’ in Bolt and Drescher (eds.), p. 27.

²⁰² MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 4 July 1832.

²⁰³ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 19 October 1832, 31 October 1832; 21 November 1832.

²⁰⁴ *Tourist*, No. 4 (8 October 1832).

²⁰⁵ *Tourist*, No. 9 (12 November 1832). The question was: ‘In the event of your becoming a member of the next Parliament, will you vote for and strenuously support measures for the immediate and entire abolition of Colonial Slavery?’

²⁰⁶ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 27 September 1832; *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, No. 101 (1 October 1832).

²⁰⁷ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 19 October 1832, 7 November 1832.

²⁰⁸ Resolution of the Board of Correspondence, reprinted in *Anti-Slavery Record*, No. 8 (1 December 1832).

signals, the Sheffield Ladies Society looked forward 'but in short and uncertain perspective' to the future.²⁰⁹ The Agency and Anti-Slavery societies made direct appeals to the newly enfranchised electorate.²¹⁰ Both attempted to capitalise on the momentum of reform: 'the reform in the representation... will prove of small value, unless it be followed up by a reform of the abuses which have grown up under the old system.'²¹¹ Emancipation would be carried on the back of this popular excitement. Plus, extracting pledges and preparing petitions for the new Parliament gave immediate purpose to the network of local auxiliaries.

The results were extraordinary. On 3rd December, the *Tourist* included the final list of pledged or reliable candidates: 217 parliamentary candidates drawn from just under 150 constituencies were recommended to the new electors.²¹² Anstey calculated that 134 pledged English and Welsh candidates were returned in the first reformed election with perhaps as many as 78 Scottish and Irish MPs also elected who were favourable to immediate emancipation. This 200 strong alliance of members created 'a political bloc probably larger than any comparable cause had ever generated.'²¹³ George Stephen noted that the new MPs 'were substantially trustworthy' in following their pledges.²¹⁴ Equally significant was the effect on the West Indian lobby. The number of West Indian supporters returned in the 1830 and 1831 elections was halved in the first reformed Parliament: only twenty West Indians remained, a mere tenth of the representation in favour of immediate emancipation. As Higman notes, 'the advent of parliamentary reform destroyed the interest, redistributed power to the new sources of national strength and effectually abandoned the spent colonies.'²¹⁵ Following the election, Wilberforce was relieved to say that at last emancipation would be accomplished.²¹⁶

On the 11th January 1833, a rumour that the government's proposed plan for emancipation fell short of immediate and entire measures was reported to the auxiliary societies throughout the country by the Agency Society. Local associations were asked to appeal to their representatives to press the case for immediate and entire

²⁰⁹ Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, *Report of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, delivered on Tuesday, October 9, 1832* (Sheffield, 1832).

²¹⁰ The plea of 'A BROTHER ELECTOR' was addressed to those who had hitherto 'possessed little power to influence the conduct of [their] rulers.' *Tourist*, No. 14 (10 December 1832).

²¹¹ *Tourist*, No. 14 (10 December 1832).

²¹² *Tourist*, No. 12 (3 December 1832).

²¹³ Anstey, 'Parliamentary reform,' p. 220.

²¹⁴ Stephen, *Recollections*, p. 167.

²¹⁵ Barry Higman, 'The West India 'Interest' in Parliament, 1807-1833,' *Historical Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 49 (1967), p. 19. Figures drawn from table 1, p. 3.

²¹⁶ MSS Samuel Roberts Letters, Sheffield Archives. No. 56: William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 1 January 1833.

emancipation on ministers. The Sheffield men's auxiliary instantly printed copies of the Agency Society's letter and informed the town's inhabitants, through handbills, that their appeal was available for signature in a number of public places.²¹⁷ This attempt to appeal to ministers directly appears to have caused the London Anti-Slavery Society some concern: following a meeting chiefly requested by William Smith, a joint-circular proposed by the Agency Society was rejected and a separate circular later issued by the London Society on 17th January.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, the two circulars were received favourably and without conflict by provincial supporters. On 26th January, the Bradford Anti-Slavery Society, of which Benjamin Godwin was one of the secretaries, issued a circular letter on the necessity of forwarding petitions to counteract the rumoured efforts by Ministers 'to bring forward some inefficient measure.'²¹⁹

The strength and ubiquity of public petitioning in the winter months of 1832-33 superseded previous attempts to raise petitions from the provinces. Although the total number of petitions presented in the 1833 session, 5,020 to the House of Commons alone, fell just short of the 5,484 petitions raised in the last campaign (1830-31), they were organised and presented in a shorter period: on average 700 petitions were presented in each month of the final campaign, compared to 500 in that of 1830-31. The oppressive repetition of the presentation of petitions, day after day for several months, must have had a powerful impression on pledged members but the government still moved cautiously. A 'safe and satisfactory' was delayed from 19th March to 23rd April. In the meantime, the Anti-Slavery Society resolved to call a general meeting but this was superseded by a plan, apparently proposed by the Agency Society, to call delegates from the principal towns across the country to attend Exeter Hall on the 18th April.²²⁰ In this endeavour, the Agency and Anti-Slavery societies quickly united and circulars were distributed to local associations requesting them to hold meetings and elect a delegate to attend London. Cropper and Sturge both volunteered to visit the principal towns in the West and North of England, at which auxiliaries were established, to aid this work.²²¹

²¹⁷ Sheffield Anti-Slavery Society, *Letter from John Crisp, having been submitted to meeting of Committee of Sheffield Auxiliary*, (Sheffield, 1833). The letter is the Agency circular of 11 January 1833. The Sheffield men's auxiliary's appeal is dated 17 January 1833.

²¹⁸ MSS Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Society, E2/3: 14 January 1833, 15 January 1833, 17 January 1833.

²¹⁹ Bradford Anti-Slavery Society, *Letter on the necessity of forwarding petitions* (Bradford, 1833).

²²⁰ MSS Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Society, E2/4: 27 March 1833, 2 April 1833, 3 April 1833; Stephen, *Recollections*, pp. 193-194.

²²¹ MSS Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Society, E2/4: 3 April 1833. In Stephen's *Recollections*, he took issue with Charles Buxton's account of the agitation which preceded the appointment of provincial delegates and insisted that lectures to aid this process had been completed by the Agency Committee in

The appeal proved remarkably successful: 339 delegates attended the meeting in Exeter Hall although its course did not run smoothly. In the fortnight preceding, the Anti-Slavery Society had heard that the government planned to compensate the planters for the emancipation and required the Society's acquiescence. The metropolitan societies, willing to concede the point to ensure emancipation, found that the provincial delegates were less acquiescent. 'People's principles are the greatest nuisances in life,' Buxton was said to have exclaimed after the meeting on the 18th April.²²² Indeed, it is a testament to the success of the Agency Committee's exertions that its 'anti-slavery creed' was vigorously defended by the delegates: *The Tourist* had included numerous articles opposing compensation for many months. Finally, a sufficient degree of support was achieved to draw up resolutions. On the following day, a remarkable procession of provincial delegates, dressed largely in black due to the predominance of religious ministers, descended on Downing Street to present the memorial of the abolition societies throughout the country to Grey.

The next month was spent by the Agency and Anti-Slavery societies in trying to convince the provincial delegates to agree to any compensation clauses which might be raised. In the face of provincial radicalism, the Agency and Anti-Slavery societies were united. However, more accurate information on the nature of the government's bill, which was further delayed until 14th May, spread greater concern and focused abolitionist fears and opposition against Stanley. Stanley's scheme, which dominated the attention of the abolitionists from mid-May, proposed not only a loan of £15 millions but an incomplete emancipation: while children under six were to be freed on the 1st August 1834, older children were turned into apprentices and forced to work for their current masters for twelve years. The gross inadequacies of the bill, which fell so far of immediate and entire emancipation as to astonish many observers,²²³ quickly drew the anger of the entire abolitionist lobby and diverted their attention away from the compensation clause. In protest, two Quaker women organised the largest anti-slavery petition ever recorded: the signatures of 187,157 women of Great Britain were raised in ten days through the network of district treasurers.²²⁴ The

the previous year. In fact, the London Society appointed Cropper and Sturge for these areas following Cropper's suggestion.

²²² Buxton, *Memoirs of Buxton*, p. 317.

²²³ See, for example, Samuel Roberts, *The Safe, Satisfactory, Efficient, Immediate, and Total Abolition of Slavery. To J. S. Buckingham, Esq. MP* (Sheffield, 1833).

²²⁴ Midgley, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-67. Historians however have not remarked on the petition against the Lords Committee which provided a precedent and model of organisation for the ladies petition.

national anti-slavery societies rallied the delegates once more to a meeting at their offices at 18 Aldermanbury on 17th May at which the bill was condemned.²²⁵

Nevertheless, although the bill contained clauses which the abolitionists opposed strenuously, the London leadership allowed the bill to be discussed in Parliament in its present form. Their hope was to secure the commitment of Government and Parliament to passing some act of abolition prior to inducing them to accept amendments. Buxton came under considerable criticism from provincial supporters in the next few weeks for his apparent complicity in Stanley's scheme and a vote of censure was passed against him by a provincial committee.²²⁶ On the 24th July, Buxton brought forward his first amendment, this to reduce the tenure of apprenticeship from twelve to one year. It was lost by only seven votes, but the narrow escape was sufficient to move Stanley to reduce the apprenticeship to seven years. In the following days, Buxton was urged to oppose the compensation clause (which had now increased from a £15 millions loan to a £20 millions grant). This he did only by suggesting that half the money should be given after the apprenticeship had been concluded. This amendment also failed. Thus the bill for the total abolition of colonial slavery, with its terms of apprenticeship reduced to seven years, passed the lower house on 7th August and shortly after was passed by the Lords. On the 28th August, it received Royal Assent.

The final campaign against slavery shows how provincial example, influence and pressure became firmly integrated into the national and parliamentary campaigns. The ideological developments pioneered in the provinces during the 1820s began to take hold of the London Society before the advent of the Agency Committee. The renewed mobilisation of the 1830s lay in the provinces and with religious groups increasingly sensitive to the persecution of their fellow Christians, black and white. This more overtly religious condemnation of slavery gave rise to the uncompromising moral stance of the Agency Committee and immediatism which in turn led to the widespread use of congregational petitioning and the revival of pledging on a systematic and nationwide basis. As agitation came to focus more on provincial efforts to shape contemporary politics, so provincial abolitionists came to enjoy more control in determining the appeals and principles of the anti-slavery campaign. While still highly responsive to metropolitan appeals, provincial abolitionists found themselves in

²²⁵ Agency and Anti-Slavery Societies, *Remarks of the Metropolitan Anti-Slavery Committees, and numerous delegates from the provincial associations, in conference on the ministerial plan for abolishing colonial slavery, at a meeting held at 18, Aldermanbury, on the 17th May, 1833*, R. K. Greville, LL.D., of Edinburgh, in the Chair (1833).

²²⁶ See *Memoirs of Buxton*, pp. 326-329.

disagreement not only with the Anti-Slavery Society but the more radical Agency Society over the right to compensation. In this way, local abolitionism came of age. The campaign against apprenticeship would see the heart of abolitionism move away from London to the provinces.

Conclusion

APOTHEOSIS - THE PROVINCIAL VICTORY AND THE DEFEAT OF PARLIAMENT, 1834-1838

With one year to wait until the apprenticeship system was introduced into the West Indies, the international dimension of abolitionism was able to come to the fore, just as it had in the years after 1807. In the winter months of 1833, George Thompson, one of the Agency Society lecturers, was asked by William Lloyd Garrison, the radical American emancipationist, to undertake a lecture tour in America. Garrison was unable to provide the necessary funds and so Thompson appealed to British abolitionists for financial aid. In October, he succeeded in forming the 'Edinburgh Society for the Abolition of Slavery Throughout the World,' and formed another such group in Glasgow five weeks later.¹ Thompson's efforts stopped there but in March 1834 the Agency Committee followed the provincial lead. As slavery existed throughout the world, and most extensively in North America, it was a logical consequence of the 'deep conviction of religious duty' held by the abolitionists that they should now turn against slavery throughout the world. The Agency noted that they had been 'anticipated in zeal' by abolitionists in Scotland and Liverpool but now put themselves forward as 'a central and metropolitan Committee' to co-ordinate action. This new body, 'The Agency Society for the Universal Abolition of Negro Slavery, and the Slave Trade Throughout the World,' focused initially on raising funds for lecture tours in America in which local societies were asked to assist. The system of agitation, which, according to the Agency Society, 'was essentially expensive and troublesome even to irritation,' was left behind - instead 'the steady and unwearied support of the Anti-Slavery public, unaided by the excitement of popular meetings, but sustained by a calm and conscientious principle of religious duty' was required.² The London Anti-Slavery Society, however, did not join this campaign, arguing that the British case still presented many dangers and that perfecting British emancipation would be the signal for the collapse of slavery in other parts of the world. During 1833-34, they launched minor Parliamentary measures to limit the terms of apprenticeship, most notably that affecting children, but with little success. As 1st August approached, the London Committee turned their attention to promoting celebrations throughout the country to celebrate the incomplete emancipation in which

¹ Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (1972), chapter 2, *passim.*; C. Duncan Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists, 1833-1861* (Louisiana and London, 1981), chapters 2 and 3.

² 'Agency Society for the Universal Abolition of Negro Slavery and the Slave Trade Throughout the World to the Anti-Slavery Associations,' (London, 14 March 1834).

they were joined by the Wesleyan and Baptist Missionary Societies.³ A mere five days after the institution of apprenticeship, the Anti-Slavery Society committee requested Buxton to make enquiries with the House of Commons as to the workings of the abolition act.⁴

The Commons initially resisted an enquiry but finally relented in the early months of 1835. The Abolition Act left the implementation of apprenticeship principally to the colonial legislatures who interpreted the act for their own benefit. No other legislature was quite so hostile to abolition as that of Jamaica which promulgated a measly bill replete with harsh vagrancy laws and a sanction of excessive punishments. The governor, Mulgrave, quickly returned to England early in 1835, leaving mitigation of the law to his successor, Sligo, and the stipendiary magistrates. By this time, news of continued punishments and evasion of the law began to reach Britain. Planters took the introduction of paid labour as an opportunity to discontinue traditional food and clothing allowances. Field slaves, including women, continued to be flogged. Moreover, the special magistrates appeared to side with the plantocracy. William Knibb, the Baptist missionary, who returned to Jamaica in October 1834, soon appreciated the horrors of apprenticeship: 'Oh, this thrice-cursed apprenticeship - nothing but blood, murderous cells, and chains!' The introduction of the treadmill, poorly constructed and accompanied by floggings, disturbed him deeply - it was later the subject of a widely distributed engraving, the anti-apprenticeship campaign's equivalent of the *Brookes* of Liverpool or the kneeling slave. In September 1836, Knibb and the Baptist ministers of the western parishes of Jamaica joined in urging the Baptist Missionary Society to press for complete emancipation by 1838.⁵

As a result of these revelations, the abolitionists began to mobilise once again. In April 1835, the Anti-Slavery and Universal Abolition societies joined forces to call a public meeting. The meeting, held on 15th May at Exeter Hall, expressed the fear that apprenticeship had been 'made subservient, in numerous instances and in a variety of ways, to oppression towards the emancipated Negroes.' This was mortifying in light of the good conduct of the apprentices during the transition and the payment of compensation to the planters.⁶ It was also clear that some of the West Indian

³ MSS 'Minute books of the Committee on Slavery,' Brit. Emp. S 20, E2/1-5 (hereafter cited as MSS 'Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society'), E2/4: 30 September 1833, 23 October 1833, 6 November 1833, 18 May 1834, 27 June 1834.

⁴ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/4: 6 August 1834.

⁵ Phillip Wright, *Knibb 'The Notorious': Slaves' Missionary, 1803-1845* (1973), p. 141.

⁶ Anti-Slavery Society, *To the Right Honourable Charles Baron Glenelg, his Majesty's principal secretary of state for the colonial department. The memorial of the Anti-Slavery and Abolition Societies of the United Kingdom* (1835).

governors were having great difficulty in obtaining the compliance of the plantocracy: on 9th July 1835, Sligo, the governor of Jamaica, wrote to Lord Suffield to ask that some anti-slavery demonstration be made to assist him in his endeavours to reduce the excesses of the apprenticeship, thus hinting at the powerful effect popular abolitionism had in the West Indies.⁷ In a spirit of reconciliation, the general meeting also passed a resolution desiring the abolition of American slavery and pledging the support of the Anti-Slavery Societies to their American counterparts. The meeting also called on Buxton to initiate a Parliamentary enquiry into the workings of the apprenticeship. Should his motion fail (and the abolitionists expected Buxton to be in a minority), the societies intended to call a general meeting of delegates to Exeter Hall at the beginning of July to support a new motion by Buxton for the abolition of apprenticeship.⁸ In the meantime, the two metropolitan societies, taking account of the public meeting in London and one in Birmingham on the 21st May, formulated an address requesting the auxiliaries to revive and put themselves in immediate communication with the London secretaries.⁹ Joseph Sturge, the prime-mover in Birmingham and a member of the Universal Abolition Society committee, was put on the sub-committee to launch this appeal.

On 19th June, Buxton introduced his motion but did not move it to a division. He may well have felt, as he later claimed to Macaulay, that he feared a defeat would show the weaknesses of the abolitionists and allow the planters to institute a vagrancy law, thereby reinstating slavery under another name.¹⁰ Whatever the case, Buxton's lacklustre efforts divided the metropolitan societies once again. On the 23rd June, a poorly attended meeting of the metropolitan committees sounded the desires of the Universal Abolition Society. George Stephen introduced resolutions which expressed, with 'deep regret,' the scant attention which apprenticeship had received in the house and called for the immediate abolition of apprenticeship and the revival of the provincial committees to achieve this aim. Calls for another general meeting were also raised. Since the committee that day was chaired by Joseph Sturge, and the Parliamentary leaders were absent, the resolutions were passed with a note that these statements reflected the society's opinion at the time. However, at the next meeting, Buxton and Lushington opposed the publication of these resolutions under the name of the joint committees thus reviving the divisions between the two societies.¹¹ Later

⁷ W. L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (1937), p. 335.

⁸ *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, pp. 123-124: Letter from Joseph Sturge to Sophia, 18th June 1835.

⁹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/4: 15 May 1835, 27 May 1835; *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, July 1835.

¹⁰ Charles Buxton (ed.), *Memoirs of Thomas Fowell Buxton* (1848), Letter from Buxton to Zachary Macaulay, c. 12-13 September 1835, p. 378.

¹¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/4: 23 June 1835, 1 July 1835.

in the year, the split became public when the Universal Abolition Society condemned Buxton's decision to allow compensation to be granted to the Mauritian planters in return for their abolition of apprenticeship.¹² Complicity through compensation once more became an issue.

These divisions were not as straightforward as they appear for both the Parliamentary and Agency wings of the London abolitionists appear to have had disagreements with Joseph Sturge. Relations between Buxton and Sturge rapidly deteriorated during 1835, leading eventually to Sturge's resignation from the Anti-Slavery Society over Mauritian compensation.¹³ George Stephen, the former leader of the 'young England abolitionists,' also had disagreements with Sturge. Stephen appears to have had little taste for agitating against the apprenticeship, and described how the old leadership had become 'weary and exhausted with labour and anxiety': indeed his *Antislavery Recollections* passes over the final campaign without mention but for an unbalanced assessment of Sturge.¹⁴ The Universal Abolition Society disintegrated along with Stephen's enthusiasm and in the last months of 1835 it made its final public pronouncements.¹⁵

Instead of remaining in London, the abolitionist centre of gravity moved to the provinces, with Sturge who returned to Birmingham. On the 23rd July 1835, a little over a month after Buxton's motion, Sturge, Riland, Taylor and Lloyd reformed the Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society and launched their campaign for the abolition of apprenticeship. Now a full year since its introduction into the colonies, the defeat of the act by colonial legislatures and stipendiary magistrates was all too readily appreciated by the Birmingham group. They quickly announced their 'independen[ce] of any Association for similar objects in London or elsewhere,' and effectively established themselves as a new national society: their avowed purpose included raising subscriptions, exerting influence on MPs, promoting petitions, and diffusing information.¹⁶ On 14th October, they organised a public meeting to protest against

¹² Buxton spoke to the committees about this in August (MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/4: 14 August 1835) but the Universal Abolition Society later opposed the motion (*The Times*, 28 November 1835, 14 December 1835).

¹³ Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (1987), p. 65.

¹⁴ Sir George Stephen, *Antislavery Recollections* (1854), pp. 209-214.

¹⁵ Temperley, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁶ Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society, *The Practical Defeat of the Abolition Act, by Colonial Legislation and Stipendiary Magistrates* (Birmingham, 11 August 1835). However, the Birmingham group also expressed a desire to co-operate with like-minded bodies across the country including London.

apprenticeship in the town hall which attracted a great number of attendees.¹⁷ However, the progress of any such effort to educate public opinion was limited by the availability of evidence. In May 1836, Cropper wrote to Sturge lamenting that 'the state of things in the West Indies is truly distressing and perplexing... But I think we yet want more information.'¹⁸ Hopes were raised by a Parliamentary select committee enquiry into apprenticeship, raised by Buxton in March of the same year,¹⁹ but when it reported in August the apprenticeship was presented as working well despite occasional abuses. The revelations of the report appear to have totally disarmed the lethargic Anti-Slavery Society which failed to meet between June 1836 and June 1837.²⁰ Cropper, meanwhile, noted that without a clear and authenticated statement of the evils of apprenticeship and its abuse, Parliament would not end the system without further compensating the slave-holders which he now feared would be given in the form of a permanent West Indian sugar monopoly.²¹ Sturge quickly resolved to counter the 'ambiguous character'²² of the Commons report by forming his own deputation to go to the West Indies. Spurred on by Cropper, he left for the West Indies with John Scoble and two fellow Quakers, Thomas Harvey and William Lloyd, on 17th November 1836.²³

Sturge's visit to the West Indies provided the abolitionists with the armament they needed. There could be no doubt of the report's conclusions, particularly its praise for the Antiguans who had voluntarily emancipated their slaves in 1834. Nevertheless, the nature of the atrocities uncovered still had a powerful impact. In particular, the use of the treadmill caught the imagination and a print of it was widely circulated.²⁴ Sturge also brought back an eye-witness, James Williams, an apprentice who had worked as a domestic servant on the St. Ann coffee plantation in Jamaica. Williams' description of the abuses he had experienced was vindicated by a document signed by

¹⁷ Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society, *Report of the Proceedings of the Great Anti-Slavery meeting at the Town Hall, Birmingham... With an Appendix containing Notes of the Condition of Apprenticed Labourers in the West Indies* (Birmingham, 1835).

¹⁸ Anne Cropper, *Extracts from the Letters of the Late James Cropper*. Letter from James Cropper to Joseph Sturge, 15th May 1836, p. 230.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Letter from James Cropper, Fearnhead, to Joseph Sturge, 25th March 1836, p. 251. 'I have seen the account of Buxton's motion, and rejoice that it was carried; and now all efforts must be directed to obtaining the repeal [of apprenticeship] which I presume will not be difficult.'

²⁰ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/4: 20 June 1836, 7 June 1837.

²¹ Anne Cropper, *Extracts from the Letters of the Late James Cropper*. Letter from James Cropper to John Cropper, 22nd August 1835, p. 232.

²² Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837* (London, 1838), p. v.

²³ Anne Cropper, *Extracts*. Letter from James Cropper, Fearnhead, to Joseph Sturge, 2nd August 1836, p. 252.

²⁴ Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837*, modern reproduction (1968), p. 190.

six Christian ministers who had known Williams' and testified to his good character.²⁵ The deputation also found that the continued hard-work of the slaves as paid apprentices had suggested to some planters that emancipation need not occasion an inevitable loss although they remained apprehensive of it.²⁶ Perhaps most significantly, Sturge made efforts to encourage abolition in Jamaica. When he arrived on the island, he and Harvey carried with them copies of abolitionist posters and cards which were circulated. Sturge's success in persuading Knibb and the Baptist missionaries to emancipate their apprentices before 1st August, added to this propaganda, put pressure on the governor and planters to follow suit, if only for fear that emancipation would take place by force on 1st August 1838.²⁷

Sturge's return to England initiated a flurry of activity among the abolitionists. His first efforts were to secure financial support from the Society of Friends who had saved the London Society from bankruptcy on numerous occasions.²⁸ Shortly after, he spoke at a public meeting in Birmingham before visiting other large towns 'everywhere addressing crowded audiences.'²⁹ His speech on this occasion was printed and widely distributed by the Birmingham Society as was the *Narrative of James Williams*. Publicising the cause was of prime importance although Sturge sometimes overstepped the mark: in the summer, he supplied the newspapers with copies of the confidential evidence he gave before a new Parliamentary enquiry, thus accidentally bringing Sir George Stephen under suspicion.³⁰ Sturge also approached the London Anti-Slavery Society who had resolved to hold a public meeting on 11th July 1837. The London Society's decision does not appear to have been influenced by Sturge directly but he quickly became involved in their deliberations.³¹ When William IV died in mid-June and a general election was called, Sturge quickly produced an *Address to the Electors of Great Britain and Ireland* which was circulated by the London and Birmingham Societies.³² At the public meeting a few days later, voters were once again asked to urge their candidates to secure 'a prompt and efficient

²⁵ James Williams, *Narrative of the Cruel Treatment of James Williams, A Negro Apprentice in Jamaica from 1st August 1834, till the purchase of his freedom in 1837, by Joseph Sturge, Esq., of Birmingham, by whom he was brought to England* (Glasgow, 1837).

²⁶ *Memoirs of Sturge*, p. 134; *The West Indies in 1837, passim*.

²⁷ Phillip Wright, *Knibb 'The Notorious'*, pp. 143-153.

²⁸ Tyrell, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

²⁹ *Memoirs of Sturge*, p. 164.

³⁰ See Stephen, *op.cit.*, pp. 209-214; Burn, *op.cit.*, p. 344. Sturge's testimony was consequently not included in the *House of Commons, Report from the Select Committee on Negro Apprenticeship in the Colonies* (1837).

³¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/5: 7 June 1837. Interestingly, the public meeting was moved by Thorowgood while Sturge was not present, thus implying that the London Society were not as apathetic as is usually proposed

³² *Ibid.*, 8 July 1837.

remedy' for apprenticeship. The death of William also inspired the London Society to ask its Ladies auxiliary in the metropolis, and similar associations across the country, to issue an address to the new monarch, their fellow countrywoman, Queen Victoria.³³ Women across the country quickly justified their public exertions on this basis: the highly active Sheffield Ladies Anti-Slavery Society raised a petition to Victoria, 'whose opening reign is still tarnished by her still being the *Queen of Slaves*,' and reiterated in graphic detail the illegal floggings of pregnant women under apprenticeship.³⁴ The resolutions of the public meeting ended with an appeal for the anti-slavery associations to revive, for subscriptions to be renewed and for the delegates of 1833 to honour their pledges never to cease until they had secured the immediate and entire abolition of slavery.³⁵

After this brief period of co-operation, however, communication between the London and Birmingham groups appears to have broken down. In part this can be attributed to the business of the general election which took place over July and August and naturally sapped the strength of the London Committee which had a strong regular component of MPs. Also the London Society was dismayed to find that Buxton lost his seat at the Weymouth election thus leaving the campaign in Parliament without its leader.³⁶ But it can also be attributed to the continued tensions between the Birmingham and London groups.³⁷ Nevertheless, the appeal they had managed to raise together produced the desired effect. Public meetings, spurred on by the general election, were held in Bath, Cork, Dublin, Derby, Kendal, Exeter, Ipswich, Scarborough and Devizes in the weeks after the London appeal.³⁸ Provincial activists were also drawn to act by the news that an Order in Council, issued on 19th August, sanctioned the hiring of apprentices in the East Indies thus threatening to reconstitute the slave trade.³⁹ The prevalent feeling was that the British public had been 'duped and deceived by Colonial chicanery' into paying compensation for little benefit.⁴⁰ Quickly, the Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society capitalised on this rising sentiment. On 6th

³³ *Ibid.*, 3 July 1837. The 'renewed and more active interposition' of female supporters, especially with regard to 'that class of their female fellow-subjects' was singled out for attention (Anti-Slavery Society circular, 'Resolutions passed at the Public Meeting, 11th July 1837').

³⁴ 'Ladies Petition for the Abolition of Slavery,' (Sheffield, 1838); 'Petition to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, from the Ladies of Glasgow and Its Vicinity, Adopted at the Public Meeting held in the Rev. David King's Chapel, 1st August 1837.' (Glasgow Chronicle, 1837).

³⁵ Anti-Slavery Society circular, 'Resolutions passed at the Public Meeting, 11th July 1837.'

³⁶ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/5: 4 August 1837, 8 August 1837.

³⁷ *Memoirs of Sturge*, p. 165. The account is an exaggeration for the London Society did not meet Sturge with 'no favour' and instead worked with him in advance of the public meeting. Nevertheless, Sturge appears to have faced difficulties in dealing with the committee and was later 'deeply grieved by this defection of old friends in his moment of need.'

³⁸ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/5: 13 November 1837.

³⁹ Sheffield inhabitants petition appeal: 'Abolition of Slavery' (n.d., Sheffield, c. 1837-38).

⁴⁰ Anti-Slavery Society, 'To the Electors of Great Britain and Ireland,' (London, 1836).

November, they issued a circular appeal to the provincial delegates who had served the cause in 1833 to attend a meeting at Exeter Hall on the 14th. The London Society took no part in this appeal and only met to hear the news of the meeting the day before it took place.⁴¹ At this point, the provincial leadership of the campaign became a recognised fact. The 140 delegates who attended the meeting formed the 'Central Negro Emancipation Committee' and committed themselves once again to unswerving attempts to destroy slavery in all its forms. 1st August 1838, the date for the freedom of non-predials (non-field apprentices), was set as the date for the total, unconditional and immediate emancipation of all the apprentices. The Central Committee also demanded a new Parliamentary enquiry and launched their own publication, *The British Emancipator*. The London Society resolved to co-operate with the delegates but to continue as a separate body.⁴² The delegates sat in session for ten days. Over the winter months, the campaign of 1832-33 was repeated and again petitions began to flood on Parliament in unprecedented numbers. By November, £1000 had been received in donations from provincial societies.⁴³ The publication of Sturge and Harvey's account of West Indian apprenticeship in January 1838 added fuel to the fire.

The cycle of delegates' conventions and defeat was repeated again. On 20th February 1838, Brougham launched the first motion for the abolition of apprenticeship from the House of Lords. It was dramatically defeated when only seven Lords voted for the measure.⁴⁴ The delegates assembled once more, this time in greater numbers: Sturge's sister, Sophia, estimated that 'nearly or quite' 466 supporters from all parts of the country converged on Exeter Hall, many of whom had been in London for several weeks.⁴⁵ Their effect was far more than a plentiful supply of hot air: members of the Commons, who attended the debate on Strickland's motion for abolition on 29th March, complained that undue pressure had been exerted on them by the lobbyists.⁴⁶ The abolitionists were defeated by 215 votes to 269. In the aftermath of the defeat, there was an outcry from provincial societies who urged their fellow townsmen to reiterate their 'just demands' in renewed petitions.⁴⁷ The delegates met for the third time in six months at Exeter Hall in advance of Wilmot's motion for abolition on 22nd May. This time the resolution for immediate abolition on 1st August 1838 was passed by 96 votes to 93. Buxton, sitting in the galleries, recorded the event: 'The intelligence

⁴¹ MSS Minutes of Anti-Slavery Society, E2/5: 13 November 1837.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15 November 1837, 16 November 1837.

⁴³ *The British Emancipator*, 14 November 1837.

⁴⁴ Richards, *Memoirs of Sturge*, p. 167.

⁴⁵ Letter from Sophia Sturge to John Clark, 31 March 1838, quoted in Tyrell, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

⁴⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, new series, 29 March 1838.

⁴⁷ Anon., 'Continued Oppression of the Slaves,' (Sheffield, 1838). This is one such example. The previous petition from Sheffield contained 18,820 names.

was received with such a shout by the Quakers (myself among the number), that we strangers were all turned out for rioting!⁴⁸ As Tyrrell has noted, Wilmot's motion was a masterpiece of political strategy. The result of the vote, though quickly overturned by the Government in the week after, was rapidly dispatched to the West Indies by the abolitionists. Their only concern was the effect which the resolution would have in the Caribbean.⁴⁹ How could the last resilient planters hold out against a populace convinced that their freedom had been granted?

The remarkable feature of this final stage of the abolitionist campaign was the effect which public opinion had on the proceedings. Glenelg's appeal to the colonial governors to abandon apprenticeship on 1st August reinforced the sense of the grim inevitability of emancipation. The slave islands of the British Caribbean voluntarily resolved to emancipate their apprentices in the following months: Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Kitts and Barbados in May, British Guiana and Tobago in June, the Bahamas, Dominica, Trinidad and finally Jamaica in July.⁵⁰ Sturge, by mobilising pressure on both sides of the Atlantic, forged the means to totally bypass Parliament and effect the abolition of apprenticeship through one force only - public opinion. At no other point in the abolitionist campaign can the force of popular mobilisation be seen to have had such a crucially decisive and ruthless effect. In 1833, public pressure was unable to convince the government to abandon apprenticeship. In 1838, it was strong enough to make a mockery of Parliamentary delaying tactics. The key development was a greater appreciation of the power of public opinion, not by Parliament but by the slaves themselves. Public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic, momentarily united, destroyed British slavery.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has looked at the ways in which popular support for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery was mobilised in the half-century between 1787 and 1838. This process was undertaken at the national and the local levels by predominantly middle-class activists and drew strength from existing loyalties which ran parallel to the branch structures of the anti-slavery movement. It has been suggested that popular support was not an autonomous phenomenon nor was it always a constructive factor. In 1807, on the eve of the Foreign Slave Trade bill, expressions of public opinion

⁴⁸ *Memoirs of Sturge*, p. 171; *Memoirs of Buxton*, p. 428.

⁴⁹ Tyrrell *op.cit.*, pp. 81-82.

⁵⁰ Temperley, *op.cit.*, pp. 40-41.

could have destroyed all possibility of a covert abolition of the slave trade; in 1792, during the abstention campaign, such an outburst, tarred with political radicalism, did indeed force the cause into a long period of hibernation. It is for this reason that popular support was mobilised at the appropriate time by local activists in contact with the London societies. Thus it has been suggested that public opinion was led and it is with this process that this thesis has been concerned.

So how far does abolitionism fit the description of a continuously evolving social movement? Historians have often used the many recurrent bursts of abolitionist petitioning to show that abolitionism as a movement continued to expand throughout these fifty years. Yet, as David Turley has pointed out, petition statistics are of limited value unless given a precise context.⁵¹ Several important discontinuities in the places which petitioning and the types of petitions raised have been hidden by the general observation that the number of anti-slavery petitions increased with each successive campaign. While it is true that the opportunity for participation increased (an ever increasing proportion of petitions were signed by the general inhabitants), the number of petitions raised in each campaign did not. In particular, by combining the petition results of 1823 and 1824 together, historians have glossed over the discontinuity in locations petitioning and the importance of efforts to mobilise support in the months between these campaigns. Furthermore, petition campaigns often represented different concerns which influenced the nature of the support raised, especially the petition campaign of 1814. While it is true that the ebb and flow of anti-slavery was dictated by petition campaigns, this focus has led to an undervaluing of the contribution made by provincial abolitionists through other endeavours and the work of female supporters generally. A great deal of abolitionist activity required only a few pairs of hands, a fact often disguised by the size of petition returns.

As a result, this study has sought to integrate the years *between* petitioning and the multi-faceted work of local committees into the history of popular anti-slavery. In so doing, we have seen that provincial abolitionists were able to contribute to the national campaign in ways other than raising subscriptions and signing petitions. Canvassing for witnesses and obtaining evidence maintained the connection between the London and provincial societies in the years between petition campaigns. Often, these efforts produced great results: Falconbridge's evidence before the parliamentary select committees, Clarkson's use of port muster rolls to calculate the mortality among British sailors engaged in the slave trade, and the famous print of the *Brookes* slave-ship. Most dramatically, Sturge's tour of the West Indies produced damaging evidence

⁵¹ David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991), p. 64.

which countered incomplete parliamentary findings, thus sparking the final campaign against apprenticeship. Another frequently overlooked contribution made by local abolitionists was in lobbying parliamentary candidates and pledging which dated from the election of 1790. These activities reinforced the lobbying efforts of the national society at the local level, particularly in 1832. We have also seen that the key to understanding the increasing popularity and expansion of anti-slavery petitioning in 1792 and the early 1830s lies in the radicalism of abolitionist thought and the abstention campaigns which began in the years immediately preceding petitioning. Abstention was appreciated at the time as a highly effective means of mobilising popular support, especially in 1791-92.

Wealthier abolitionists, principally those country correspondents on whom the campaigns of 1788 and 1792 hinged, were also able to contribute to the cause as shareholders. Half of those who owned shares in the Sierra Leone Company lived outside London and many were drawn from the network of trusted abolitionist sympathisers. The formation of the Sierra Leone Company paralleled provincial mobilisation in 1791-92 and may have reinforced it by putting abolitionists into contact with each and providing others with a financial incentive for success. However, shareholders understood that commercial gain was a serendipitous consequence of a plan principally designed to aid Africa and to abolish the slave trade. In this way, the Sierra Leone Company was another consequence of the very real frustration felt by abolitionists with parliamentary delay which also fuelled abstention, immediatism and pledging in the early 1790s. Thus, by integrating the Sierra Leone Company into the history of abolitionism we have gained a greater sense of the moral principle which underpinned the movement and of the way in which the business acumen of supporters and the commercialisation of British society were appreciated by the abolitionists and used to full effect in their campaigns. These important connections between London and the provinces existed outside the burst of popular petitioning. These low-key efforts provide a continuity of activity, support and personnel at the local level - the maintenance of a small network of trusted correspondents and provincial agents - who could excite more overtly popular expressions of abolitionism when required. These agents could act with the assurance that public opinion lay in abeyance but remained on their side.

The previous focus on petitioning years has also hidden the invaluable contribution made by women's societies to the campaign. Firstly, the close association of men's groups with public endeavours for the cause meant that the period of the late-1820s, when petition campaigns were infrequent, saw men's societies take a less active role

thus threatening the continuity of support. However, women's auxiliaries, which were encouraged to undertake less public duties from their origin in 1825, were not dependent on the rhythms of petitioning and flourished. In 1828, the London Anti-Slavery Society put ladies' associations on a pedestal for their continuing support in a time of relative malaise for the movement in general.⁵² Secondly, as women were traditionally discouraged from political activities, the campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts had a less divisive or distracting effect. We have seen how this campaign sapped the activities of the London society and its male auxiliaries in 1827-28. Thirdly, the attention paid by ladies' societies to domestic exertions and on the moral complicity of consuming slave-produce allowed women to lay the foundations for the mass petitioning of 1792 and to spearhead changes in the ideology of anti-slavery in the 1820s. Without the need to rely on public meetings, which frequently sidelined new and controversial demands such as immediatism or abstention for the sake of unanimity, female supporters' dependence on less public endeavours proved to be a strength of the cause and gave abolitionism greater continuity at the local level in the years between petitions. The women's network of the late-1820s provides ample evidence for the existence of a continuously evolving social movement *within* anti-slavery.

The focus on petition campaigns has also led historians to view abolitionism in the 1820s as a barren field for study. We have seen how the economic perspectives which helped to revive the anti-slavery movement in 1822-23 came to dominate abolitionism in the following years. The sugar duties question provided the abolitionists with a solid economic rationale for effecting slave emancipation. But while it allowed emancipation to be presented as a factor in the national interest, its disassociation from moral arguments and its predominant gradualism brought upon the movement a period of self-reflection. This activity took place primarily at the local level where abolitionists were not tied to negotiations with the colonial office and increasingly felt frustration with parliamentary efforts and the London leadership of the movement. The divisiveness of the sugar question, combined with the relentless pressure of religious persecution in the West Indies, heralded changes within abolitionist thought which laid the foundations for the uncompromising moral stance of abolitionists in the 1830s, a moral perfectibility defended by provincial supporters who consequently became the first and most prominent to attack apprenticeship. The equalisation issue in particular brought abolitionists to consider the proximity of domestic 'wage'

⁵² *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 32 (January 1828). A pantheon of female abolitionists was listed; *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, No. 36 (May 1828). The 'only new matter contained in' the report of the London Committee was praise for the number of ladies' associations which were increasing at this time.

slavery. By so doing, the *laissez-faire* economic arguments which Davis suggests allowed the abolitionists to displace pressing domestic concerns performed precisely the opposite function.

Provincial abolitionist activity during the late-1820s also influenced the way in which the final campaign against slavery progressed. It has been shown that the Agency Committee, which has been traditionally seen as the instigator of the revival of popular abolitionism in the early 1830s, was influenced by prior provincial example. The revival of popular activity in 1830 can be traced to the activities of religious groups in the provinces which had come to regard the abolition of slavery as a necessity in response to the endemic persecution of missionaries in slave societies. Similarly, the efforts employed by provincial activists to raise support, especially lecturing and the content of those lectures, influenced the Agency Committee in its choice of tactics and propaganda from 1832. We have also seen how the Agency Committee was not as radical or as pioneering on its formation as Sir George Stephen attempted to show in his *Anti-Slavery Recollections* (and its quiet during 1837-38 would appear to back this up). The Agency Committee of 1832 had its roots twelve months earlier in an active home correspondence sub-committee which shows that the London Society had already taken cognisance of the progressive mood among provincial supporters and acted upon it. In particular, there is ample evidence to suggest that the London Society had moved towards an immediatist position *before* Rev. Andrew Thomson's Edinburgh speech which was singled out by Davis as the crucial catalyst in this development. In fact, Thomson's speech was merely a well-publicised aspect of the more general emergence of a morally-righteous and immediatist outlook in the provinces between 1824 and 1830 which has now been charted. The developments within abolitionist thought in the 1820s help to explain the strength of the provincial voice in the final campaigns against slavery and apprenticeship.

In this sense, there was a very strong continuity between successive anti-slavery campaigns. The focus on petitioning has diverted attention away from those other duties undertaken at the local level which bridged the gap between boom years. This continuity in tactics, outlook and movement organisation is matched by one of personnel. Support for abolition persisted because abolition drew on the affiliations of everyday life. Many religious groups remained committed to abolitionism throughout this period and used their own denominational organisation to cultivate and to mobilise support. In particular, this study has highlighted the extent of the Quaker contribution. The declining numbers of the Society of Friends as a whole have led

many historians to conclude that the importance of the Quakers similarly declined yet there are significant grounds to dispute this. In 1787, they represented three-quarters of the Abolition Committee; in 1823, they represented half those members named at the first meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society. And on both occasions, most had served on Quaker committees to oppose slavery which had existed in the years immediately preceding. Quakers represented a significant proportion of those country correspondents who engineered popular mobilisation in 1788 and 1792. They may have co-ordinated one-third of all petitions raised across Britain in 1792, perhaps as many as one-half of those raised in England alone. These basic facts suggest an influence far greater than their proportion within British society at the turn of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries would suggest and that only a few individuals were required to put the train of popular abolitionism in motion. Moreover, the whole sect's commitment to anti-slavery is dramatically illustrated in the extent of their financial contributions to the cause. In May 1826, the Quaker anti-slavery sub-committee held £8,788 of which all but £200 had been raised through subscriptions. The Anti-Slavery Society received just under £3,000 in donations, subscriptions and proceeds from publications in the same year (including gifts from the Society of Friends and individual Quakers).

It has been suggested that the interlocking system of meetings, and the strictures of the central body, ensured a responsive anti-slavery community which maintained a commitment to abolitionism in periods of decay as well as success. The marital, familial, religious and business linkages which permeated the Society of Friends proved to be useful channels for the spread of information and the organisation of popular support. The pioneering efforts of Quakers in the four years before 1787 paved the way for national organised popular abolitionism. The Quaker sub-committee made an invaluable contribution by formulating and disseminating a canon of abolitionist theories and evidence which popularised those writings fundamental to the cause throughout this period. In many parts of the country, including Manchester, the Quakers were prominent in the organisation of local committees and the mobilisation of popular support. In Wales and Ireland they provided the beachheads for abolitionist agitation. And through the system of monthly meetings, vast financial sums were raised in support of the cause. Non-Quaker supporters could fairly assume that local Quakers would join the committee of their auxiliary society.

The key point is that abolitionism resided in a number of networks which ran parallel to the organisation of the movement but were not synonymous with it. These networks allowed a commitment to anti-slavery principles to persist during years of repression

or malaise and provided the props for mobilisation during years of petitioning and popular activity. Public opinion was not autonomous, nor was it entirely consistent, but the abolitionists could increasingly rely on its support. The abolition of the slave trade itself was an important step in this direction in that it translated abolitionism from an outside pressure to a national virtue. The emergence of an uncompromising moral stance in the 1820s led to the alliance of abolitionists with denominational organisations which were influential in securing popular mobilisation. As the voice of public opinion became more assured, abolitionists at the national and local levels could play a greater role in effecting their aims directly until ultimately the force of public opinion was able to by-pass parliament entirely.

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~~THESES AND DISSERTATIONS~~

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