

Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade

The **Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade**, (or The Society for The Abolition of The Slave Trade), was a British abolitionist group, formed on 22 May 1787, when twelve men gathered together at a printing shop in London, England.

Origins

The first statement by Dutch and German Quakers was signed at Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1688. English Quakers had begun to express their official disapproval of the slave trade since 1727 and promote reforms. From the 1750s, a number of Quakers in Britain's American colonies also began to oppose slavery, calling on English Quakers to take action, and encourage their fellow citizens, including Quaker slave owners, to improve conditions for slaves, educate their slaves in Christianity, reading and writing, and gradually emancipate them.

An informal group of six Quakers pioneered the British abolitionist movement in 1783 when the London Society of Friends' yearly meeting presented its petition against the slave trade to parliament, signed by over 300 Quakers. They subsequently decided to form a small, committed, non-denominational group so as to gain greater Anglican and Parliamentary support.

The new, non-denominational committee had nine Quaker members, who were debarred from standing for Parliament, and three Anglicans, which strengthened the committee's likelihood of influencing Parliament.

Membership

Nine of the twelve founding members of the Society for effecting the abolition of the slave trade were Quakers: John Barton; William Dillwyn; George Harrison; Samuel Hoare Jr; Joseph Hooper; John Lloyd; Joseph Woods Sr; James Phillips; and Richard Phillips.^[1] Five of the Quakers had been amongst the informal group of six Quakers who had pioneered the movement in 1783 when the first petition against the slave trade was presented to parliament.

Three Anglicans co-founded the committee, Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp and Philip Sanson.^[1]

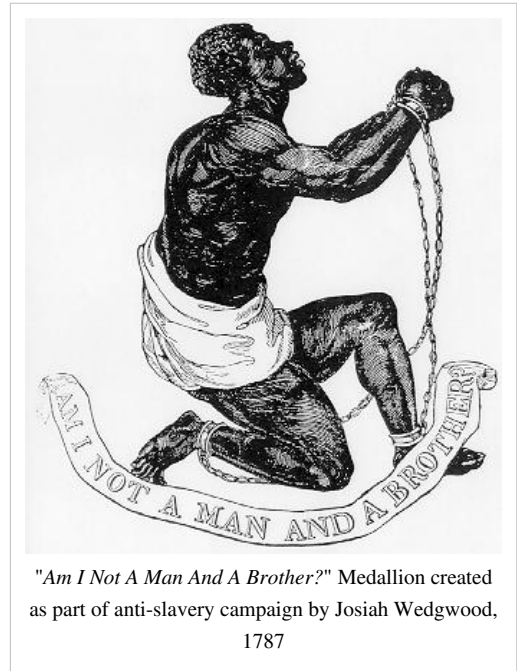
Women's involvement

Women played a large role in the anti-slavery movement but were not eligible to be represented in the British Parliament and often, in the manner of the times, had to form their own separate societies. Many Women were horrified that women and children were taken away from their families. In 1824, Elizabeth Heyrick published a pamphlet titled *Immediate not Gradual Abolition*. In this Heyrick urged the immediate emancipation of the slaves. The Anti-Slavery Society had been founded to promote gradual abolition and though dominated by members with this view, who sought to downplay the challenge, a ginger group of members formed to campaign for immediate progress. The Female Society for Birmingham had a network of women's anti-slavery groups and Heyrick's pamphlet was publicized here.

Mission and support

The mission of the *Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade* was to inform the public of the immoral acts committed in the act of slavery, bring about a new law to abolish the slave trade and enforce this on the high seas, and establish areas in West Africa where Africans could live free of the risk of capture and sale. It pursued these proposals vigorously by writing and publishing anti-slavery books, abolitionist prints, posters and pamphlets, and organizing lecture tours in towns and cities.

Petitions were presented to the House of Commons, anti-slavery rallies held, and a range of anti-slavery medallions, crockery and bronze figurines were made, notably with the support of the Unitarian Josiah Wedgwood whose production of pottery medallions featuring a slave in chains with the simple but effective question: *Am I not a man and a brother?* was very effective in bringing public attention to abolition.[2] The Wedgwood medallion was the most famous image of a black person in all of 18th-century art.^[3] Thomas Clarkson wrote; "ladies wore them in bracelets, and others had them fitted up in an ornamental manner as pins for their hair. At length the taste for wearing them became general, and thus fashion, which usually confines itself to worthless things, was seen for once in the honourable office of promoting the cause of justice, humanity and freedom".^[4]



"Am I Not A Man And A Brother?" Medallion created as part of anti-slavery campaign by Josiah Wedgwood, 1787

By informing the public, the *Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade* gained many members. Public interest was generated immediately after the Committee formed, in 1787, by Thomas Clarkson's tour of the great ports and cities of England. Very shortly the public mood was further aroused by the work of the African Olaudah Equiano, whose autobiography demonstrated both literary skill and an unanswerable case against slavery. In 1789 Clarkson was able to promote the Committee's cause by encouraging the sale of Equiano's first-hand account of the slave trade and slavery abroad, and his visits to British ports linked to the trade.

William Wilberforce introduced the first Bill to abolish the slave trade in 1791, which was easily defeated by 163 votes to 88. As Wilberforce continued to bring the issue of the slave trade before Parliament, Clarkson and others on the Committee continued to travel, raise funds, lobby, and to write anti-slavery works. This was the beginning of a protracted parliamentary campaign, during which Wilberforce introduced a motion in favour of abolition almost every year.

Successes

Gradual abolition

Even with all of this support, it took twenty years of work by the Society, and others - including captive and freed Africans, missionaries and evangelical movements in the colonies - to achieve the first stage of legal emancipation in the colonies. Over the course of this period membership of the Committee came to include the Quaker philanthropist William Allen, who worked closely with Wilberforce, and with his fellow Quaker Committee members.

In 1807 the British Parliament voted to abolish the slave trade and enforce this through its maritime power. The following year, Freetown in West Africa, established in 1788, when the Timni chief Nembana sold a strip of land for the use of a free community of ex-slaves from America, was given greater British protection under a separate Act.

Abolition itself followed slowly, as agreements were concluded by the Colonial Office and the various semi-autonomous colonial governments. After further British parliamentary legislation, slaves in all of Britain's colonies emancipated in 1838; although even then, many of the 'replacement' indentured labor schemes had to be challenged then reformed substantially or abolished over time through renewed anti-slavery campaigning, since colonial schemes could be used to thwart emancipation in all but name.

Moreover, slavery continued on a large scale in the United States of America, which had become independent of Britain in 1783, until the South was defeated in the American Civil War in 1865.

Slavery abolished

In 1827 the Sheffield Female Society was the first to call for immediate emancipation. In 1830 the Female society for Birmingham urged the Anti-Slavery Society to support immediate abolition instead of gradual abolition. In 1830 the Anti-Slavery Society finally agreed to support immediate abolition. In Britain the Slavery Abolition Act was passed in 1833.

References

- [1] d'Anjou, Leo (1996). *Social Movements and Cultural Change: The First Abolition Campaign*. Aldine de Gruyter. p. 198. ISBN 0202305228.
 - [2] http://www.thepotteries.org/did_you/005.htm
 - [3] "British History - Abolition of the Slave Trade 1807" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/africans_in_art_gallery_02.shtml). BBC. . Retrieved 2009-04-11. "The Wedgwood medallion was the most famous image of a black person in all of 18th-century art."
 - [4] "Wedgwood" (<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/REwedgwood.htm>). . Retrieved 2009-07-13. "Thomas Clarkson wrote; ladies wore them in bracelets, and others had them fitted up in an ornamental manner as pins for their hair. At length the taste for wearing them became general, and thus fashion, which usually confines itself to worthless things, was seen for once in the honourable office of promoting the cause of justice, humanity and freedom."
- Coffey, John. *The Abolition of the Slave Trade: Christian Conscience and Political Action*
 - Hochschild, Adam. *Bury the Chains, The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (Macmillan, 2005)
 - *Abolition in Britain*. A KS3 History Resource of Britain and the Transatlantic Slave Trade
 - *Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade*

External links

- The history of Sierra Leone (<http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/sierraleone.htm>)
 - Parliament & The British Slave Trade 1600–1807 (<http://www.parliament.uk/slavetrade>)
 - Anti Slave Trade Petition Manchester 1806 (http://slavetrade.parliament.uk/petition_for.php)
 - Transcript of the First Quaker Petition to Parliament in 1783 (http://abolition.e2bn.org/source_34.html)
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