

Quakers and abolition

Subject guide



There was no unified stance on slavery and the slave trade among early Quakers. Many were slaveholders, while others spoke out vehemently against the trade. American Friends, who could see the reality of slavery for themselves, were the first to call for action, and their views gradually prevailed.

The large-scale campaign to abolish the practice was begun by British Quakers. They created Britain's first anti-slavery organisation and came up with innovative ways of bringing attention to the issue, including mass media campaigning, product boycotting and widespread petitioning.

During this period one of the most effective ways of communicating to a large audience was to circulate pamphlets, a publishing model that Quakers had followed for over a century. Many Quakers wrote, published and distributed pamphlets explaining their views on slavery. Quaker publisher James Phillips is especially well known for reproducing an image of the slave ship *Brookes*, which showed the shocking number of enslaved people a ship could legally carry.

The Quaker campaign didn't end with the abolition of the British slave trade. The 1807 Act allowed the continued enslavement of those already in bondage. Many Quakers felt strongly that an immediate and total abolition of slavery was necessary. Quaker women, including Elizabeth Heyrick, Sophia Sturge and Anne Knight, led boycotts of slave-produced sugar and cotton.

Following the Slavery Abolition Act (1833), which made claiming ownership of people illegal in the British Empire, Quakers began working to end slavery elsewhere, and have continued to do so.

1657

Early Quaker leader George Fox writes "to Friends beyond the sea that have blacks and Indian slaves", reminding them that all are equal in God's eyes

1727

London Yearly Meeting officially disapproves of slavery

1767

London Yearly Meeting bans the ownership of people by its members

1772

London Yearly Meeting makes first corporate statement urging the abolition of slavery

1783

London Yearly Meeting presents a 273-signature petition to parliament and sets up a committee on the slave trade – this is Britain's first anti-slavery organisation

1787

The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade is formed. Nine of the 12 founder members are Quakers. William Wilberforce is approached to act as parliamentary spokesperson

1807

The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act is passed

1833

The Slavery Abolition Act is passed

1839

Joseph Sturge founds the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (today called Anti-Slavery International)

Slavery and abolition in the Library collections

Getting started

Carey, B (2012) *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657–1761*. New Haven: Yale University Press. [051.69 CAR]

A look at the beginnings of the Quaker anti-slavery movement, which started in America

Brown, CL (2006) *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. [051.69 CAR]

Chapter 7 is a good summary of Quaker involvement in the anti-slavery movement, with some useful references

Hochschild, A (2005) *Bury the Chains: the British Struggle to Abolish Slavery*.

Basingstoke: Macmillan. [051.69 HOC]

A readable history of the abolition movement

Midgley, C (1992) *Women Against Slavery: the British Campaigns 1780–1870*. London: Routledge. [051.69 MID]

Helpful for understanding the role of women in the campaign for abolition

Heathfield, J (2016) *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838–1956*. London: Hurst and Company [051.69 HEA]

A good introduction to some of the work that took place after slavery was abolished in 1833

In the catalogue

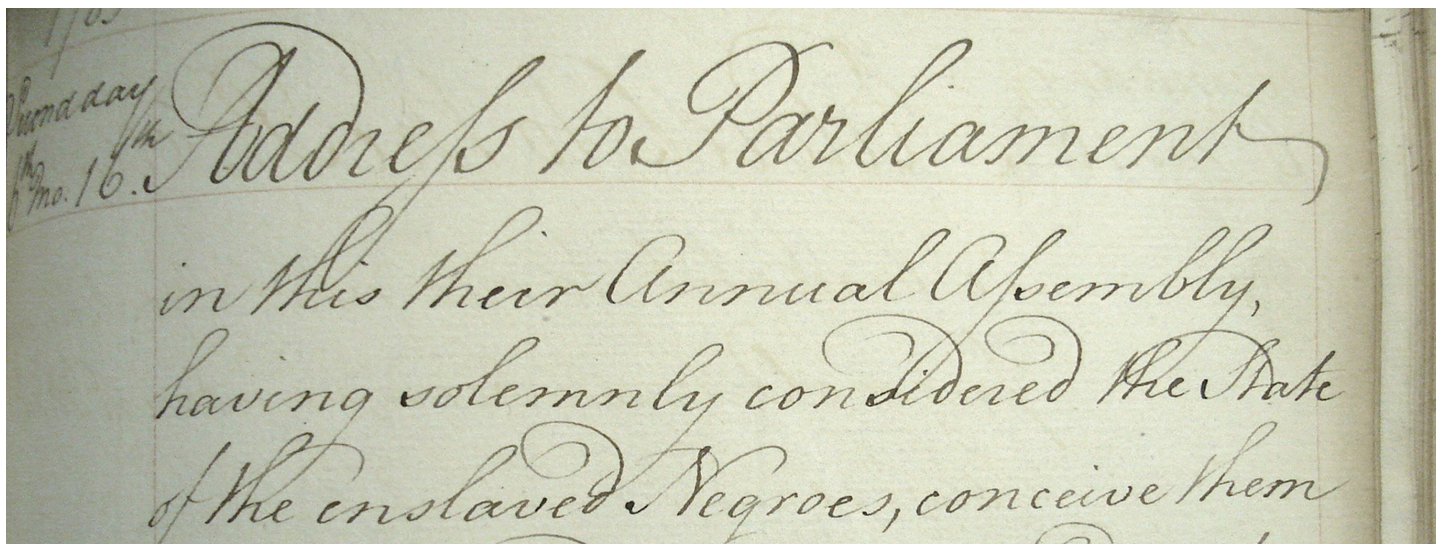
To see what we hold on slavery and the abolition movement, search our online catalogue at <http://quaker.adlibhosting.com/search>

The following terms might be useful when searching the catalogue:

- abolition
- anti-slavery movement
- free produce movement
- slave trade
- slavery
- sugar boycott.

There are too many Quaker abolitionists to list here. Once you have come across individuals in your research, the most effective way to search for resources on them in the catalogue is by [surname], [forename].

Some of our archives have yet to be entered in our online catalogue. However, we offer other tools for finding material, so please get in touch if you're looking for material on a specific topic.



Pamphlets

The Library has one of the best collections of early modern abolition pamphlets in the world, totalling over 600 items and including rare and unique tracts by leading abolitionists and local abolitionist societies, as well as a few pro-slavery tracts.

Relevant pamphlets can be found using the online catalogue. There is also a handlist available in the reading room, digital copies of which can be obtained by emailing library@quaker.org.uk.

Special collections

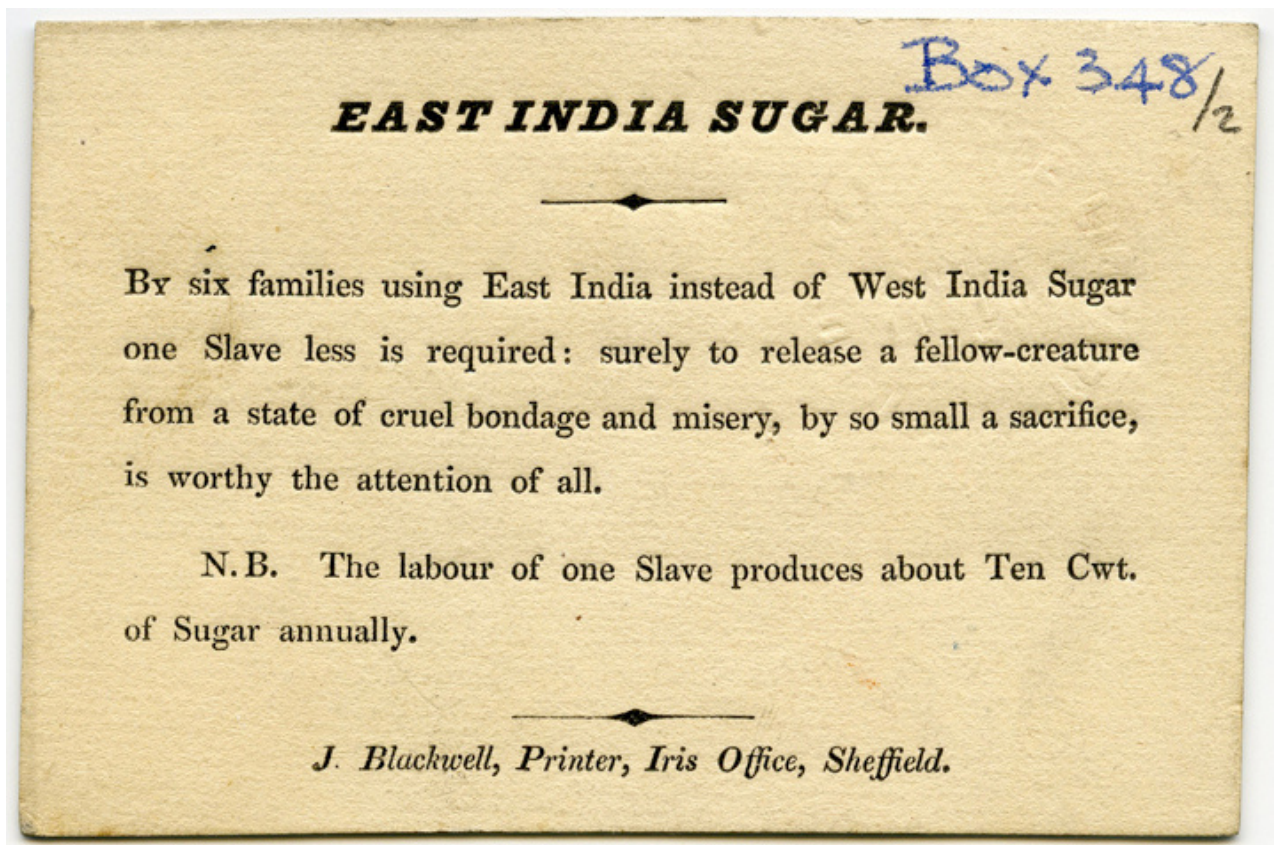
The Library holds objects relating to the anti-slavery movement, including anti-slavery teacups, samples of free cotton and a silk handbag made to hold abolition pamphlets. We also have some engraving and silhouette portraits of prominent Quaker abolitionists. These items can only be viewed by prior arrangement – please contact us for further details.

Archive collections

Highlights of our collections include:

- Records of the Quaker Slave Trade Committee (1783–1792) [YM/MfS/STC]
- Minutes of the Tottenham and Edmonton Female Anti-Slavery Association (1828–1837) [TEMP MSS 994]
- The papers of abolitionist Anne Knight [MS Box W2; MS Vol s486; MS Vol s495; MS Box G2/3].

We also hold the Thompson-Clarkson collection [MS Vol 326–328], three volumes of illustrations, letters and portraits relating to people mentioned in Thomas Clarkson's *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*, put together by Thomas Thompson. Thompson was the son-in-law of the abolitionist publisher James Phillips and included many letters Phillips had received in the collection.



Online resources

Quakers and Slavery project

<http://web.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/speccoll/quakersandslavery/>

This project has digitised material on Quakers and slavery from the collections of Haverford and Swarthmore colleges and it is a particularly useful resource for understanding the response of American Quakers to slavery.

Legacies of British Slave-ownership

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs>

This database of slave owners was built by tracking compensation paid to slave owners following the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Since you can search the database by religion, it's possible to find British Quakers who owned slaves at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries.

James Birney Collection of Anti-Slavery Pamphlets, Johns Hopkins University

<https://archive.org/details/birney>

Primarily American but with some British content, the browser allows you to filter by year, creator and language.

Slave Voyages

<https://slavevoyages.org>

This project describes itself as a digital memorial, offering data on the enslaved people who were taken across the Atlantic – who they were, where they came from and where they ended up.



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