



Abolition Journeys

Resources to help Friends of all ages remember the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and work to remove its modern variations.

Developed by Quaker Life Committee for Racial Equality with the Quaker Life Children and Young People's Staff Team

This anniversary is a cause for remembrance, thanksgiving, learning and action.

Remembrance of the immense suffering and what created it ; of the resistance and victory and, for Quakers, of the power of quiet processes based in small but growing circles of discernment, ministry and deeply felt action.

Thanksgiving for the abolition and the courage and perseverance of the women, men and children, slave and non-slave, of all races, classes, faiths and employment who, for 140 years, worked for it to happen.

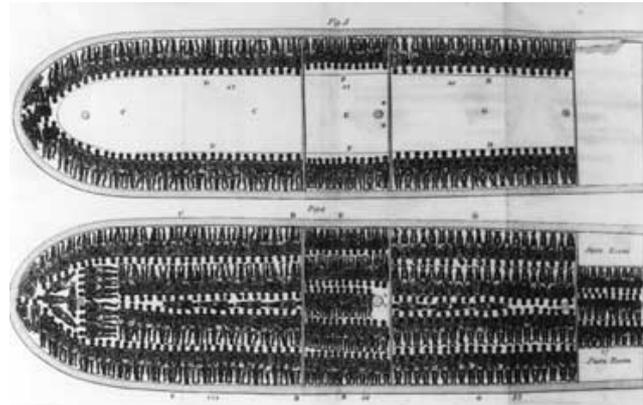
Learning from the past into the present that slavery in any form is utterly wrong.

Action is essential. Discerning the best ways to act for our different communities and ourselves is a deeper challenge.

Quakers played an early and significant role in the campaign for abolition.

This introduction and subsequent resources and activities will do several things:

- Help Friends of all ages gain an understanding, in ways meaningful to them, of what slavery was, and where it continues.
- Present approaches to help Friends and others with whom they are associated discover how Quakers acted – through worship, discernment, business, campaigning, non-violence, personal change and challenge.



- We hope to offer voices of slaves and Friends from the past.
- It will seek to make the historic Quaker response then, relevant to our experience, understanding and ability to respond to the world now. This is a difficult subject and it is not just history.
- It will emphasise the roles, skills, experience, courage, ingenuity and suffering of slaves in working for their own freedom.

Abolition Journeys is closely tied with the children and young people's resource publication **Journeys in the spirit**. From now to July each issue of 'Journeys in the Spirit' is going to have information and activity linked to the abolition of the slave trade.

To receive 'Journeys in the Spirit' please use the enclosed subscription form or email to journschild@Quaker.org.uk

With this copy of 'Abolition Journeys' there are two information and activity sheets. Both of these are intended to encourage you and your meeting to plan and organise activities across all ages in your own meeting or with others.

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Living ministry, witness and testimony – a heartbeat from then to now.

Here is a simple timeline of some of the key moments of Quaker involvement in the abolition of the slave trade. This is not simply history. It is an evoking of ministry, witness and testimony that, if we let it, can speak to and encourage us now.

“After all, what makes any event important, unless by its observation we become better and wiser, and learn ‘to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly before God’?”

Olaudah Equiano – freed slave and activist

George Fox writes *letter of caution* 1657

“To Friends beyond the sea, that have Blacks and Indian slaves”. He did not condemn slaveholding as such, but reminded slave owners that everyone was equal in the sight of God.

George Fox visits Barbados 1671

Urges Friends to treat their slaves better, educate them and to set them free after a limited term.

William Edmundson Quaker 1676
Rhode Island

Writes a general letter of advice to Quakers in America calling on them to free their slaves. Probably the first Quaker to denounce slavery outright.

Germantown Friends, Pennsylvania 1688

The first public protest by Quakers against slavery. Four Dutch and German Quakers draw up a formal ‘remonstrance’ against slavery and the slave trade, and send it to the Monthly Meeting in nearby Dublin (Pennsylvania). This was later published as ‘Germantown Friends’ Protest against slavery’. It said in part: *“Now, tho’ they are black, we cannot conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones...And those who steal or rob men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not all alike?”*

Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting 1696

Makes the first official, corporate

pronouncement against the slave trade. They urged Quaker merchants and traders to write abroad to their correspondents that they send no more Negroes to be disposed of [sold]. The Yearly Meeting sought the advice and counsel of London Yearly Meeting, considered then the mother body of Quakerism.

London Yearly Meeting 1727

Expresses its outright disapproval of the slave trade. *‘It is the sense of this meeting, that the importing of ‘negroes’ from their native country and relations by Friends, is not a commendable nor allowed practice, and is therefore censured by this meeting’*.

John Woolman Quaker 1754

Publishes *‘Some considerations on the keeping of Negroes. Recommended to the professors of Christianity of every denomination’*.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting 1754

Agrees to disown Quakers who refuse to free their slaves.

Anthony Benezet Quaker 1759

Writes his *‘Observations on the enslaving, importing and purchasing of Negroes’*, the first publication to use stories of slave traders and other eyewitnesses. He points out that if buyers did not demand slaves, the supply would end. *“Without purchasers,”* he argued, *“there would be no trade; and consequently every purchaser as he encourages the trade, becomes partaker in the guilt of it.”*

London Yearly Meeting 1761

Writes a Minute saying that: *‘that the slave trade is a practice repugnant to our Christian profession’*. It disowns slaveholders or those active in the slave trade and appeals to Friends against the system.

London Yearly Meeting 1772

Makes its first appeal outside of the Society against slavery and calls for the practice of holding of slaves to be *‘utterly abolished’*.

1st Quaker anti-slavery society 1775
Philadelphia

Friends organise the *‘Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully held in Bondage’*



Amelia Opie

What did women do?

The role of women in the campaign is remarkable because this was a section of the population still disenfranchised, without votes or political power, yet they played an important role.

Women abolitionists who were active in the 1820s and 1830s, such as Elizabeth Heyrick, Anne Knight and Elizabeth Pease are well-known. But there were many Quaker women in the 1780s and 1790s who gave their support and campaigned, including Mary Birkett Card, Amelia Opie, Mary Morris Knowles.

Women brought a distinctive approach to the campaign, such as writing and circulating imaginative literature and poetry on slavery. For example:

- Amelia Opie's poem *The negro boys tale: a poem addressed to children*, first published in 1802.
- The medallion produced by Josiah Wedgwood and worn by women was adapted to show a kneeling woman slave with the words, 'Am I not a woman and a sister?'
- As the main buyers of sugar women played an important part in the sugar boycott 1792

(American war of independence 1775 –1783)

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM) 1776

Following the lead of London Yearly Meeting PYM again made slave holding a disownable offence

Antony Benezet Quaker 1780

Helps secure an *Act for the Gradual Abolishment of Slavery* from the Pennsylvania Legislature – the government

Recognising that Britain remained the key to closing down the slave trade, American Quakers urged their British counterparts to petition Parliament.

London Yearly Meeting June 17th 1783

Presents a petition to Parliament against the slave trade signed by 273 Quakers.

Meeting for Sufferings June 20th 1783

Meeting for Sufferings sets up a 22-member committee to 'embrace all opportunities to promote the intention of the Yearly Meeting respecting the slave trade' and 'to obtain and publish "such information as may tend to the abolition of the slave trade'. This was Britain's first anti-slavery organisation.

Six Quakers 1783

A few weeks after this group is set up six Quakers meet informally as a separate group. This group writes anti-slavery literature for newspapers and lobbys (talks to) Parliament. These actions by Quakers were effectively the first organised lobbying activities in Britain for abolition.

(USA established September 3rd 1783)

William Dillwyn late September 1783 & John Lloyd

The Committee asks William and John to write 'a short address to the public'. This is ready just three weeks later and 2,000 copies of "*The Case of Our Fellow Creatures*" come out in December. A further 10,000 were printed and distributed in 1784 – given to every MP, the Royal Court and other 'notables'. They felt this was less successful than hoped and realised they needed to connect with abolitionists

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting October 1783

Sends its own petition to the United States Congress.

Thomas Clarkson 1785

Given first prize in the University of Cambridge for '*An Essay on the Slavery and*

