

Legacies of (Anti)-Slavery: Christ's and the Abolitionist Movement

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Introduction and Methodology

In undertaking this investigation, I wanted to look more closely at anti-slavery activists and abolitionists in Christ's history. Some incomplete data was available from prior investigations, so I set to work sifting through the Cambridge Alumni online database - ACAD - for key terms such as 'slavery', 'radical', 'abolition', and the very laborious 'anti'. My search found at least 6 notable figures, of whom I decided to document as much as possible. Particularly interesting were the amount of alumni from slave-owning families that became abolitionists in later life - although a few of these names had to be omitted from the final report due to insufficient evidence on both counts.

Last year's research laid a strong foundation for further investigation. The researchers were able to identify multiple figures involved in the slave trade - or with links - providing a list of names to input into Sarah and Fergus' database. I decided to make a comprehensive overview of the anti-slavery and abolitionist writers and political actors. This appealed to me as many legacies of slavery projects tend to overlook

anti-slavery figures in their research on this topic. I made the distinction between ‘anti-slavery’ and ‘abolitionist’ due to the nuanced and complex political spheres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in regards to slavery. It mostly works as a spectrum, as some figures were philosophically anti-slavery but did little to corroborate it through writings or actions, perhaps outside of petitions and parliamentary speeches. Those that fall into this category tend to be figures who are more directly involved in institutional politics. ‘Abolitionists’ tended to be stronger in their rhetoric, opting to write or campaign actively outside of parliamentary circles. Many of these abolitionists, especially Charles Besley Gribble, were deeply religious people who opposed all forms of slavery on *a priori* grounds, rather than just in the context of excessive cruelty or mistreatment.

I have decided to present my research person-by-person, documenting the life and politics of each figure, as well as delving deeper into any literature or sources they produced. Although most material was available online - especially via ACAD - I ventured to the Lambeth Archives to research a pamphlet - *Slavery a Sin; Aunt Phillis’ Cabin Reviewed* by Charles Besley Gribble - which they did not have. However, they helpfully re-directed me to the National Archives’ section for the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, of which Gribble was a member. Although the physical documents are held in the Bodleian, the Archives held limited scans in Collection no. 2; MSS Brit Emp s 16-24 of the group’s activity. There, I was able to find in meetings’

proceedings notes containing an extended review of the pamphlet which enlightened me on Gribble's argument. Outside of this, most information was available online - mostly through the eBooks and Texts section of 'archive.org', as well as several websites which had profiles of figures that were involved more directly in parliamentary anti-slavery. I've compiled this information into miniature biographies of the figures studied, with the aim of enlightening the reader on the history of anti-slavery and abolitionism within Christ's history.

Research Findings

Arthur Todd Holroyd (1806 - 1888)

Arthur was born on December 1st 1809 to a middle-class merchant family in Harley Street, London. His mother, Elizabeth Lofthouse, came from a prominent textile-owning family in Manchester, whilst his father, Stephen Holroyd was a produce trader who died shortly after Arthur's third birthday. There is no evidence, that I found, to suggest that either side of his family had links with slavery or colonialism. In childhood, Holroyd gained a scholarship to study at Ripon Grammar School before arriving at Christ's in 1827. He read Medicine, and qualified as a doctor in Edinburgh in 1830. The same year, Holroyd married Sophia Abbs, the daughter of a radical Quaker priest, before retraining as a lawyer at Lincoln's Inn the following

year¹. At this time, Holroyd grew ‘tired’ of academic work and was instead ‘determined to quit England’ to travel the world².

His staunch anti-slavery was documented in his travel writings, *Notes on a Journey to Kordofán*³, depicting his extensive travels around the Upper Nile. He travelled from Alexandria to Old Dongola - modern day Sudan - which was then an Egyptian outpost, before arriving in Khartoum for a few months’ stay. Khartoum was then the administrative capital of Beledd es Sudan, under the control of the Egyptian government, and primarily used as a trading city. Holdroyd condemned the ‘rendezvous for slave-caravans’ as a clear ‘defiance of the Bible’, which much ‘English money [is] embroiled’ in. He travelled further south to Kordofan - allegedly the first recorded Englishman to do so - where he detailed the experience of open slave markets and how army officials would capture slaves from the streets to pay for gambling debts. ‘A more heart-rendering scene cannot be imagined’, wrote Holroyd in 1837, ‘to let this [go on] is equal evil’⁴. Interestingly, Holroyd examined the racial dynamics of the region, noting that the slaves were ‘negro’ whilst their owners were ‘tan’ Arabs. Upon returning to Cairo, Holroyd repeatedly petitioned, protested, and

¹ Most biological information comes from his obituary in *The Sydney Morning Herald* from 17 June 1887, p.5. It can be accessed online here, <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/1366665>>

² Ibid.

³ Holroyd, Arthur T. "Notes on a Journey to Kordofán, in 1836-7" in *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*. 9, p. 163–191. (1839) Accessed online 21 July 2022

<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1797720.pdf>>

⁴ Ibid.

attacked the Egyptian government for endorsing race-based slave trading, accusing governor Khurshid Pasha and calling him a 'brutal murderer'.

Holroyd never properly returned to the UK. He moved to Wellington, New Zealand in 1843 before relocating, with his daughter, to Sydney, Australia in 1845. In 1851, Holroyd was elected to Australia's colonial parliament as a member for the Western Boroughs on a ruralist but radical platform, where he became an advocate for indigenous 'negro' rights, before being appointed to the South Wales Supreme Court in 1866. In later life he became a collector of Aboriginal art, before passing away from 'the effects of old age' at 80 in 1887.

William Frend (1757-1841)

Frend was born to tradesman George Friend, the twice Mayor of Canterbury, into a quiet upper-middle class household. He attended the King's School, Canterbury, before matriculating at Christ's in 1775 to read for the Ministry, where he was tutored by William Paley. He migrated to Jesus for his Masters degree, becoming a fellow there in 1781, where he taught notable alumni such as Robert Malthus and Ada Lovelace. After briefly studying in Paris, Friend fought in the American War of Independence, before retreating to Ely to become an ordained priest after his conversion to Unitarianism - associated with political radicalism at the time. This was

the beginning of Frennd's radical tendencies; he was later removed from the Church from his condemnation of the liturgy in 1788, and from his fellowship by the Vice-Chancellor after condemning the war with France in 1793.

This catalysed his move to London, where he quickly became a prominent figure in the city's radical and reformist circles. He was encouraged to join the London Corresponding Society by reformer James Tosh. Indeed, it was in his house that William Godwin first met William Wordsworth in 1795. His writings reflected these views, with treatises including 1795's *The Scarcity of Bread* about inequality and the need for poor relief, *A Plea* 1799's *Principles of Taxation* which argued for a graduated income tax, and *A Letter on the Slave Trade* in 1816. The latter was mostly a reappraisal of William Wilberforce's 1807 *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, where he extends the argument to posit that slavery is against the eighth commandments - that 'thou shalt not steal' - and therefore was a grave sin. Frennd maintained frequent correspondence with Thomas Clarkson, the leading English abolitionist and founder of The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade which helped pass the Slave Trade Act 1807. Frennd avidly supported Clarkson's work, and, in letters, thanked him for performing 'god's will' to prevent the 'defacement [sic] of Negroes'.

He was paralysed by an unknown cause in 1840, passing away a year later in Tavistock Square, London, aged 84.

The Hon. Robert John Smith, Lord Carrington (1796-1868)

Lord Carrington presents an interesting case of conflicted interest. Although he was publicly against the slave-trade, his family still owned enslaved people and property in Jamaica - including under his name - until it was criminalised. Born into an elite family in 1796, Carrington was educated at Eton College before matriculating at Christ's aged 15 in 1811. He had a varied life, becoming a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1839, a Colonel in the military, and served as the Whig MP for Wendover succeeding his cousin, Abel Smith. He joined the house of Lords in 1838 on a hereditary peerage following his fathers death, where he became more notably in favour of the anti-slavery movement. Carrington has quite a notable family tree - with his great-grandson being Peter Carrington, Foreign Secretary under Margaret Thatcher in the late 1970s, whose son recently came under criticism for attaining his family peerage from slave-trade derived wealth⁵.

Carrington's father was also an MP and close ally of William Pitt the Younger. Indeed, Robert's father is listed as a claimant after the 1836 Abolition Act for over 268 enslaved people in Farm Pen, St Catherine, Jamaica, which earned him slightly over £4908⁶. His father, the 1st Baron Carrington, left £59,573, land in Britain, and an

⁵ <https://www.thenational.scot/news/18530448.peers-owe-house-lords-seats-slave-trade/>

⁶ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/11954>

estate in Jamaica to Robert in his will. This includes an estate in Wycome, Buckinghamshire, that was purchased using slave-trade money.

On 25th March 1807, parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, which Carrington openly supported. This meant that it became illegal to transport enslaved people to the British colonies, although Carrington's family still owned slaves in Jamaica until 1834. Carrington's attendance in the Commons was allegedly poor, which makes it all the more interesting that he attended to present an anti-slavery petition on 6 April 1824⁷. It was believed he used the same Bible passage to condemn the enslavement of Africans as he did for his later speech in the Lords on the abolition of the death penalty for minor offences in 1830⁸.

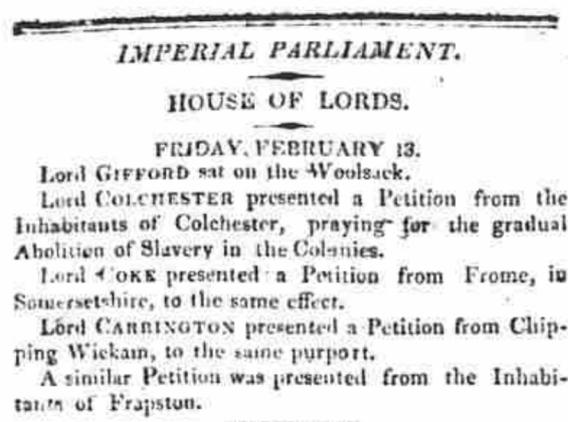
He held socially liberal views in his few appearances in Parliament, including petitioning for Jewish and Catholic emancipation, against the conversion of South American natives, and for the strengthening of workers' rights. The end of enslavement came in August 1834, after parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act the previous year. This newspaper article [below] was published in 1824, two dates, and shows Lord Carrington presenting an abolitionist petition to the House of Lords. Remember that, at this time, he still owned people and property in Jamaica⁹.

⁷ <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/smith-hon-robert-1796-1868>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://nottinghammuseums.org.uk/nottinghams-links-to-slavery-in-jamaica-robert-smith-lord-carrington/>

Historians, such as Catherine Hall, have suggested that the motivation behind absentee slave-owners support for abolition was driven by the fact that the plantation economy was in decline¹⁰. However, Carrington's liberal views elsewhere suggest he had some sense of sincere belief in the cause, especially as he stood for re-election - in a heavily wealthy and conservative area - on the grounds of his 'detestation of slavery' as against Biblical teachings¹¹.



Rev'd Thomas Haweis (1733-1820)

Thomas Haweis was born in Truro, Cornwall, in 1733 to his Church of England priest father, Thomas, and mother, Catherine. He was admitted as a fellow in medicine to Christ's in 1772, after spending his undergraduate years at Christ Church, Oxford.

Haweis was deeply religious for most of his life - his father was a Churchman, and he

¹⁰ Catherine Hall, *Legacies of British Slave-ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*. (Cambridge University Press: 2016).

¹¹ <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/smith-hon-robort-1796-1868>

retrained to become a deacon in the 1750s, working as the personal chaplain to the Earl of Peterborough in 1755. Only two years later, however, Haweis was dismissed from his role for his 'Methodist sympathies'¹². After his stint as a fellow at Christ's, Haweis moved to London where he founded the Second London Missionary Society in 1794, a progressive anti-poverty organisation which preached in deprived areas of the inner city. During these years, Haweis was a prolific writer - publishing over 40 works, many of which were commentaries and translations of the New Testament.

In his later life, Haweis befriended two prominent abolitionists; William Cowper and John Newton. It is clear that Haweis and Newton were close; Haweis sacrificed his position in the parish of Olney, Buckinghamshire to give to Newton. Although Newton started out his career as a slave trader, he was turned away from the business in a 'confession too late' by observing the brutality of the Middle Passage. Newton and Cowper were known friends and collaborators of William Wilberforce - although I found no evidence to connect Haweis to Wilberforce directly. Haweis was a life-long writing companion of his, publishing Newton's 1764 *Authentic Narratives of Some Remarkable Particulars*, an autobiography. The publication of this book led both Haweis and Newton reconsider the slave trade, alongside ideological influence from their mutual friend William Cowper. Cowper wrote multiple anti-slavery poems,

¹² Haweis' entry on Venn ACAD
<<https://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search-2018.pl?sur=&suro=w&fir=&firo=c&cit=&cito=c&c=all&z=all&tex=haweis&sy=&eye=&col=CHRISTS&maxcount=50>>; Accessed 22 July 2022.

and late became a lead writer for the Abolitionist campaign group; with 1888's *The Negro's Complaint* - published with an opening thanking Haweis - quoted by Martin Luther King Jr¹³. In addition, Haweis edited and helped publish John Newton's 1788 anti-slavery text *Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade*. Although these texts were mostly *a posteriori* critiques of slavery, Haweis' own views were borne not through experience with the slave trade - which my research indicates he had no connections with - but through religious conviction. Indeed, Newton's writings on slavery in later life credit Haweis with 'convincing' him that his earlier years in the trade were spent with him *not* being able to call himself a Christian, as slavery was antithetical to Christendom.

Charles Besley Gribble (1807-1878)

Charles Besley Gribble was born in 1807 to a nautical family with a father of the same name, who was a fleet commander for the East India company - a Nonconformist conservative who signed Edmund Burke's petition in condemnation of the French Revolution. Besley Gribble Jr. matriculated at St John's in 1825 before migrating to Christ's in 1838, where he received his BA and MA. Shortly after, he was ordained deacon to serve in Buckinghamshire, working as a heavy Evangelical who frequently

¹³ King, Martin Luther Jr., Carson, Clayborne; Holloran, Peter; Luker, Ralph; et al. (eds.), *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr: Threshold of a new decade*. (1997)

attacked Tractarianism, spending time at Trinity College, Toronto, as a preacher¹⁴. In 1847, Gribble returned to London, where married a widower named Catherine Jackson. He worked for the London City Mission, a non-denominational philanthropic agency, where he worked to tackle poverty in the city - a form of charity work that he balanced with his work for the National Society for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck (now RNLI), in which he gave several speeches denouncing the death of slaves from seafaring related disasters. In 1850, Gribble joined the Anti-Slavery Society based in St Paul's - publishing a pamphlet called *Slavery's Sin; or Aunt Phillis' Cabin Reviewed* - distributed by Nisbet in 1852. The title is in opposition to Mary Eastman's novel - *Aunt Phillis' Cabin* - a pro-slavery text which extols the nurturing good nature of some Southern US slave owners, juxtaposing them with harsher plantation owners in the Caribbean. Notably, this text has links to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, showing that Gribble was well-informed in the debate around American versus Caribbean slavery. In this text, reviews of which are in the National Archives, Gribble re-orientates the debate to a philosophical condemnation of slavery, rejecting the principle of enslavement regardless of individual cases of 'positive' treatment.

Gribble uses his evangelical background to wade through over 35 Biblical references to anti-Slavery, dedicating a concluding paragraph to Galatians 3:28 (*There is neither*

¹⁴ <http://www.stgitehistory.org.uk/media/gribble.html>

Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus) to show that the equality of human beings in the eyes of God prohibits the ‘manufactured hierarchy’ of the slave / master relationship. Interestingly, he especially focusses on Old Testament passages, stating that in the general discourse on slavery they are often turned ‘a deaf ear’ to. Exodus 21:16 (*Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death*) and Deuteronomy 24:7 (*If a man is found stealing one of his brothers of the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst*) viewing them as legal precedents for the abolition of slavery. The Hebrew Bible legal codes make clear the ‘abhorrence’ of the theoretical ownership of slaves, meaning it is an evil in itself, rather than as a result of ill-treatment. These instances of slave abuse aren’t mentioned much in the pamphlet, as it is a rather theoretical examination.

Gribble’s later life was varied and rich. In 1860, he moved to Turkey, settling in Istanbul, to support the Protestant community and charity sector in the city. Whilst there, he became interested in astronomy, writing on Jupiter’s satellites and other detailed astronomical accounts. His son, John Brown Gribble - 1847-1893 - migrated to Queensland, Australia, to work as a Church of England missionary. Whilst there, he was a strong advocate of indigenous and Aboriginal rights, leading him to be dismissed from his position in the Church.

Conclusion

This investigation lays the foundations for delving deeper into Christ's anti-slavery past - which involves both politicians in Westminster and radical preachers across the empire. A variety of different arguments against slavery are given, based both on observation of the slave-trade's cruelty and brutality, and also the antithetical nature of slavery to Christianity. Indeed, it is notable that many - if not all - of the figures above leaned heavily into theology to justify their opposition to slavery, and many of which were deeply religious people both by conviction and profession. This investigation has also shown the complexity and nuance that the spectrum of anti-slavery and abolitionism lays bare - figures such as Lord Carrington had a deeply complicated relationship with enslavement, trading, and anti-slavery sentiments, and it is not always completely clear that their ideologies were motivated by ethics alone. It is also notable that for many figures - including Besley Gribble, Frend, and Holroyd - abolitionism was part of a wider corpus of progressive beliefs that they held. This means anti-slavery often intersected with combating poverty or inequality at home, indigenous movements across the empire - especially Australia, and Catholic emancipation. This is why these figures must be situated both within the wider socio-economic contexts in which they operated and *also* their array of beliefs and own life experiences in politics. I hope to see this research taken further in future

years to build a full database of Christ's alumni associated with anti-slavery movements, in order to highlight the role that our alumni have played in opposing the brutality against enslaved people in British history. In particular, I would encourage further research into wider anti-colonial and anti-imperial figures listed in alumni archives, to gain a wider perspective on the history of our connections with wider progressive politics in modern history.