

HOMEWORK HELPSHEET / REVISION FILE

THE ABOLITIONIST CAMPAIGN

KP8

BACKGROUND

In 1781 Captain Collingwood of the slave ship Zong threw more than 100 slaves overboard and tried to claim insurance. The court case, which followed, was reported in newspapers and brought the slave trade into public view. The Quakers who set up a committee to abolish slavery in 1783 started the abolitionist movement. In 1787 other religious groups opposed to slavery came together to form the **Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade**. They set up branches all over Britain and organised the first, and one of the most successful, public campaigns in history. This was due to three men in particular – Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce. The abolitionist opposed the whole idea of slavery but recognised that the government would not interfere with the property rights of slave owners and that it would cost too much to compensate them for the loss of their slaves. They believed that if they could persuade Parliament to abolish the trade in slaves this would eventually lead to the end of slavery and that slave owners would treat their slaves better because they would become more valuable.

THE ABOLITIONISTS

☒ **Granville Sharp**, a lawyer won the cases of escaped slaves Jonathan Strong (1765) and James Somerset (1771). Owners now had rights over a slave only if the slave agreed in writing and they could not force a slave to return to a foreign country – Africans now had legal rights in Britain.

☒ **Thomas Clarkson** interviewed 20,000 sailors and collected equipment used on slave-ships such as iron handcuffs, leg-shackles, thumbscrews, jaw-openers and branding irons. He spoke at public meetings and produced pamphlets and books showing the cruelty of the slave trade.

☒ **William Wilberforce** led the campaign in Parliament. In 1787 he introduced a Bill to abolish the slave trade. It was thrown out, but in 1792 MPs agreed to abolition. However war with France saved the trade. Wilberforce introduced an abolition Bill every year and in 1807 finally succeeded.

ABOLITIONIST ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE SLAVE TRADE

It was immoral and against the Bible and God's will to use other human beings as slaves.

The trade caused cruelty, suffering and thousands of deaths.

Slaves were treated very badly during the horrific middle passage and many died.

The slave trade led to wars, death and destruction in Africa.

American and French revolutionaries and many writers argued all humans had a right to be free.

Some opponents believed that if the slave trade stopped, all slavery would soon end.

Adam Smith argued that slaves were more expensive than free labour.

British trade with India and the Far East was increasing where cheaper sugar could be produced.

The slave trade prevented the development of British industry and the creation of new jobs in Britain.

The trade led to the deaths of thousands of British sailors.

METHODS OF THE ABOLITIONISTS

Books, newspapers, posters and pamphlets, letters to newspapers to gain public support.

Olaudah Equiano, a former slave published his autobiography telling of his experiences as a slave – It was a best seller and became one of the most important abolitionist books.

John Newton, a former slave ship captain spoke at meetings and published a book about the evils of the slave trade

Abolitionists collected signatures and sent hundreds of petitions to Parliament
Josiah Wedgwood produced a cameo of a poor African begging to be free – thousands were sold.
Large public meetings were held and clergymen used Sunday sermons to condemn the slave trade
Abolitionists campaigned to persuade people not to buy sugar produced by slaves.
In Parliament, William Wilberforce argued against the trade and introduced Bills to abolish it.
The Society for Abolition organised witnesses to give evidence to Parliament about the slave trade.