

The Bishops of Bath and Wells and Their Links to the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Referenced Report of Findings

University of Exeter Internship, SCP 5998, Research Assistant, Legacies of Transatlantic Slavery in the West Country

Research carried out from mid May – end July 2022
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Introduction:

This research project set out to examine whether the Bishops of Bath and Wells had any connections with the British transatlantic slave trade. Previous research at the Bishop's Palace had already established that some members of the bishops' extended families may have had distant links with British slavery in the West Indies, but the bishops themselves did not appear to have had direct connections with, or personal benefits from, the slave trade. Further investigation did not change this conclusion. A possible connection was explored with the wealthy local Dickinson family, who owned plantations in the West Indies. Many items of Dickinson family correspondence are held in Taunton at the South West Heritage Trust, but a detailed examination of their catalogue listings did not reveal anything particularly significant, and this line of enquiry was set aside.

The area in which this research was able to uncover useful findings was in relation to the connections between the bishops and the campaign against slavery. Two bishops were found to have specific links with the abolition movement. Bishop Beadon (in office 1802 – 1824) belonged to a key national anti-slavery organisation, attended at least one important anti-slavery meeting in London and mixed within the social circle of known abolitionists. Bishop Law (in office 1824 – 1845) had far greater involvement in the anti-slavery campaign. He spoke against slavery in a Lords debate, presented numerous petitions in the House of Lords, supported London-based abolitionist activity and chaired two local anti-slavery meetings in Bath. The third bishop who might reasonably be thought to have involvement with anti-slavery activity is Charles Moss, Bishop of Bath and Wells from 1774 – 1802. His time in office covered the first wave of the anti-slavery movement in the 1780s and 90s. However, this research project found no definitive connection between Charles Moss and anti-slavery activism, although it is clear that he did on occasions mix with those involved in this work, including leading abolitionists Granville Sharp and Hannah More.

Due to time constraints, this research project has only looked at online sources. (A visit to the South West Heritage Trust, which also holds many documents from Bristol and Bath archival centres, was within the remit of this research, but no documents of particular relevance to this project appeared to be held there.) The research has focussed on the bishops in office during the key anti-slavery movement in Britain from the 1780s to the end of the 1830s. Time has not allowed for detailed exploration of the activities of the Bishops of Bath and Wells from the mid 1840s onwards.

The report that follows will initially provide some context with a brief summary of the anti-slavery campaign from the 1780s to 1838. It will then look firstly at Bishop Law, as his involvement in the anti-slavery campaign was the most extensive. This will be followed by the research results on Bishop Beadon, and finally, the findings on Bishop Moss. I have included some quotes that may be useful, but there are further quotes if required within the primary/secondary source material listed in each section of the report, which is in a file attached to this report.

Abbreviations in use in this report, and on the primary source files, are 'BBW' for Bishop of Bath and Wells, and 'BNA' for British Newspaper Archive.

Summary of British anti-slavery campaign from 1780s – 1838:

A brief summary of the key moments in the British anti-slavery campaign may be a useful aid to understanding the significance of the findings in this research. The abolition campaign started in the 1780s, led by William Wilberforce in parliament. Also influential was Thomas Clarkson, who raised support for the campaign with extensive visits around the country, particularly to Liverpool and Bristol, to gain evidence about the slave trade from eyewitnesses. In 1807 the Slave Trade Act was passed, banning the British trade in slaves. Campaigners had hoped this would lead the slave trade to die out naturally. However, this did not happen. The abolitionists realised their campaign must continue, but found little parliamentary appetite for this, as Britain was distracted by war with France, and worries about the spread of slave resistance, for example after the 1816 rebellion in Barbados. It was not until 1823 that the anti-slavery campaign was reignited. Campaigners finally achieved their goal of the abolition of slavery in the 1833 Abolition Act, which was implemented the following year. However, the Act required slaves to work out an apprenticeship which campaigners believed was little better than slavery itself. Abolitionists focussed their energies on opposing the apprenticeship scheme which was finally abolished in 1838. Part of this abolition deal was a £20 million package of compensation for those who had owned slaves. After 1838, anti-slavery campaigners turned their attention to slavery in other parts of the world, in particular America, where slavery was finally abolished in 1865.

George Henry Law, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1824 – 1845

(Life dates: 1776 - 1845)

House of Lords debate on slavery

The BBW spoke during a debate on slavery in the House of Lords on 7 March 1826. This followed the debate several days earlier in the Commons. The bishop spoke about the 'incompatibility of slavery with the Christian religion' and described slavery as a 'foul spot'.

Primary and secondary sources for BBW speech in Lords debate:

- Full report on the Lords debate in Anti-Slavery Reporter Vol 1, 'Commencing June 1826 and ending May 1827'. Report on the debate starts on p. 107. Comments by BBW on P.113.
- Screenshot of BBW comments from the Anti-Slavery Reporter, p. 113, (see above).
- Morning Post, 8 March 1826, report on Lords debate 7 March 1826. (BNA).
- Representative newspaper, 8 March 1826, report on Lords debate 7 March 1826. (BNA).
- Text of BBW speech to Lords 7 March 1826, from Hansard.

Petitions Presented to the House of Lords

The Bishop presented at least twelve petitions against slavery between 20 February 1826 and 3 June 1833. These were on behalf of various different groups in the Somerset and Devon area, for example, the inhabitants of Bath, Glastonbury, Frome, Wellington etc.

Petitions presented to the Lords as follows, with wording where available from Hansard:

1. 20 Feb 1826, from Wellington, Somerset.
2. 21 Feb 1826, from more than 3000 inhabitants of Bath.
3. 27 Feb 1826, from inhabitants of Glastonbury in Somerset.
4. 1 March 1826, from residents of 'Melcome Regis' (may be Holcombe Regis)
5. 3 March 1826, from clergy and inhabitants of the Deanery of Axbridge in the county of Somerset, and deanery of Bath and Wells.
6. 20 April 1826, from the city of Wells.
7. 4 Nov 1830, from the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Wells, and from the Inhabitants of Bath, from the Inhabitants of Frome, and from Protestant Dissenters at Frome.
8. 9 Nov 1830, petitions presented for the abolition of slavery - from Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Blackburn, Whitby, Stone, and several places in Lancashire, Somersetshire, and Yorkshire.
9. 12 Nov 1830, for the immediate abolition of slavery, from the Clergy of the County of Wilts, and from Cromer and Chard.
10. 24 Mar 1831, from South Moreton and Hagebourn.
11. 5 April 1832, from the parish of Mary-le-bon.
12. 3 June 1833, from a number of places – against slavery.

Bath petition:

Among the petitions is one from Bath, presented by BBW to the House of Lords on 21 February 1826. It is likely to be this petition that was discussed at a meeting in Bath on 3 February 1826, which was chaired by the BBW. (This meeting is covered later in this report.) A report from the Bath Chronicle on 9 February about that meeting include a copy of the text of the petition which includes the following quotes.

'The Petition of the Inhabitants of Bath and its vicinity humbly sheweth, That your Petitioners regard the system of slavery, existing in our British West India colonies, as equally opposed to the inalienable rights of mankind; the spirit of christianity, and every maxim of sound policy.'

The text also adds this comment about compensation to slave owners:

'That whilst your petitioners feel bound to protest against the unnatural system of colonial bondage, it is their anxious wish that its abolition should be effected "*with a just and equitable consideration of the interest of all parties concerned;*" and they therefore think it due to themselves to declare their wish that compensation may be awarded to all who may be able to prove to the satisfaction of your Honourable House that loss has accrued to them from slave-emancipation.' (Italics from original text.)

Two newspapers (the Hereford Journal and the Globe) both printed reports which include words from the bishop as he presented this petition from Bath to the Lords on 21 February 1826. (See details in primary sources listed below.)

Bishop's comments in the Hereford Journal report:

'I am, as well as the petitioners, decidedly of opinion that the Abolition of Slavery should be early as possible but not sudden. If the extinction of Negro Slavery was sudden, it must be attended by bad consequences.'

This view was echoed by the anti-slavery campaigners at the time, who believed that slaves should be given religious education before they were freed.

Bishop's comments in the Globe report:

'He approved of such petitions, as by showing the unanimous sense of every class of people in this country, they could not fail to produce a considerable effect on the minds of the colonists, and also on the conduct of a neighbouring nation which still carried on the slave trade. The continuance of slavery was contrary to the spirit of Christianity, and no measure contrary to that spirit had ever been of any real benefit to any society or people.'

Primary sources for petitions presented by the Bishop of Bath and Wells:

This is a selection of news cuttings which mention petitions presented by the BBW. Also see www.Hansard.parliament.uk but this only provides text in a modern font, rather than the original documents, and is less suitable for illustrative purposes for a public information board or leaflet.

- 9 February 1826, Bath Chronicle, **text of petition** (quoted above) discussed at meeting in Bath on 3 February and presented to the Lords by BBW on 21 February 1826.
- 21 February 1826, Morning Advertiser, reports a petition against slavery from BBW presented on 20 February 1826. (BNA.)
- 22 February, Morning Post, reports a petition from more than 3000 inhabitants of Bath presented on 21 February 1826 by BBW. (BNA).
- 22 February, Globe, reports a petition presented by BBW on 21 February - **with comments (quoted above) about positive effects of such petitions.** (BNA).
- 28 February 1826, Morning Herald, reports a petition from inhabitants of Glastonbury presented on 27 February by BBW. (BNA).
- 1 March 1826, Hereford Journal, reports a petition and details of what the bishop said as he presented the petition from Bath on 21 February 1826 – **with comments about not wanting immediate abolition.** (BNA).
- 2 March 1826, Sun (London), reports a petition presented by BBW on 1 March 1826 from 'Melcome Regis' and 'some town in Devonshire...'
- 4 March 1826, New Times, reports a petition presented by BBW on 3 March 1826, from deanery of Axbridge and Deanery of Wells. (BNA).

- 21 April 1826, Morning Advertiser, reports petition presented by BBW on from City of Wells on 20 April 1826. (BNA).
- 13 April 1832, Durham County Advertiser, petition from Mary-le-bon presented on 5 April 1832. (BNA).

Bath anti-slavery public meeting – 3 February 1826

The bishop spoke at two public meetings in Bath against slavery. The first was on **3 February 1826**. The bishop took the chair at a public meeting at the Guildhall. The meeting had been called to raise a petition against slavery to send to the House of Lords. (This is likely to be the petition that was presented on 21 February 1826.) The bishop expressed ‘sorrow and shame’ about slavery. (Merseyside scrapbook quote. See below.) He also said that emancipation of the slaves should not be immediate. It should not happen until the slaves had been educated. The Bath Chronicle reports him saying, ‘Emancipation of the mind should precede that of the body.’ He also said, ‘You may depend upon it that both in the House and out of the House the cause shall have my warmest support.’ This final comment is one of the strongest quotes from the BBW but it is not in the Bath Chronicle report. However, it is reported by newspapers in Worcester and Taunton (see below).

Primary sources for Bath meeting on 3 February 1826:

- Google Books, Letters to Marquis of Landsdown, which has a report taken from the Bath Journal. This does not include the quote about ‘my warmest support’. ¹
- Bath Chronicle, 2 Feb 1826, giving notice of the meeting due to be held on 3 February 1826. (BNA)
- Bath Chronicle, 9 Feb 1826, report on the meeting, without the ‘warmest support’ quote. (BNA)
- Bath Chronicle, 9 Feb 1826, full report, in case you want to extract the **wording of the petition**. (BNA).
- Worcester Journal, 9 Feb 1826, gives a report on several anti-slavery meetings around the country. It makes special mention of the ‘warmest support’ quote from the BBW. (BNA).
- Taunton Courier, 8 Feb 1826, also reports briefly on the meeting mentioning the ‘warmest support’ quote. (BNA).
- Report from ‘Merseyside scrapbook of anti-slavery items – includes ‘sorrow and shame’ quote - Gale resources.

¹ Google Books has a copy of ‘Letters to the Most Noble the Marquis of Landsdowne, and the Right Hon. Earl of Carlisle, on Prison Discipline etc. etc.’ which includes a report taken from the Bath Journal of the public meeting held in Bath Guildhall on 3 February 1826, entitled ‘Emancipation of Female Negroes Recommended: On Moving the Petition from Bath - Bath anti-slavery meeting’. Pub 1828, J Hatchard and Son, Piccadilly, London. P. 209.

Bath anti-slavery public meeting - 22 October 1830

The second public meeting in Bath, over which the BBW presided, was on 22 October 1830. The meeting was addressed at length by William Wilberforce. Again, the Bishop said that slavery should be abolished, but not immediately. He also said that some compensation might need to be paid to slave holders. Strangely I cannot find press reports about this meeting in any Bath newspapers, though it is reported in the Bristol Mirror. There is a lengthy report in the Anti-Slavery Reporter.

Primary sources for Bath meeting on 22 October 1830:

- Anti-Slavery Reporter, January 5 1831, Vol. 4, No. 2. Mentioned in a round-up of anti-slavery meetings. This is on p. 50 of Volume 4 of Anti-Slavery Reporters from 1831 from Google Books. It includes a long report on the address by William Wilberforce.²
- Also attached is a screenshot of the relevant paragraph from the above document.
- Bristol Mirror, 23 October 1830. (BNA).

Anti-Slavery Society in London

The Bishop attended an important meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society in London on 15 May 1830. This was the main anti-slavery organization in the country, leading the campaign for abolition. On this date a meeting was held at Freemasons' Hall in London, the venue for many anti-slavery activities at this time. The gathering was described as a meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society 'and its Friends'. Approximately two thousand people were present including William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson. The Bishop of Bath and Wells was the only bishop listed in press reports attending this meeting.

Primary sources for Anti-Slavery Society meeting on 15 May 1830:

- From Anti-Slavery Reporter, Vol. 3, 'Commencing June 1829, and ending December 1830'. (No. 61, 'For June 1830' No. 13), p.229.
- Anti-Slavery Reporter, as above, details of those attending the meeting, p.229.
- Morning Herald, 17 May 1830. Full report on the meeting. See column one. (BNA).
- Morning Herald, 17 May 1830. First paragraph of report naming BBW. (BNA).
- Globe, 17 May 1830, report on Anti-Slavery Society meeting on 15 May 1830. (BNA).

² Anti-Slavery Reporter was one of the main abolition campaigning journals, edited by leading abolitionist Zachary Macaulay. Printed in London by Samuel Bagster, (vol 3) or Hatchards, Piccadilly. Copies of this magazine can be found on Google Books. Note that on occasions the magazine is called Anti-Slavery *Monthly* Reporter, (including word 'Monthly').

Slavery ‘conference’ in parliament on 3 March 1826

The Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser on 4 March 1826 reported a meeting that took place the previous day in a room known as the ‘painted chamber’ at parliament between members of the House of Commons and the Lords, which included the BBW. The report says that Mr Canning requested a ‘conference’ with several members of the Lords ‘on subjects of importance to the West Indian Colonies’. It adds that ‘Managers of the Conference’ were appointed, which included the Duke of Gloucester, (a leading abolitionist) and the Bishop of Bath and Wells. The meeting then took place and a resolution on slavery was drawn up and would be formally considered the following Tuesday. It is not clear from the newspaper article exactly what this ‘conference’ was, but it further confirms that the BBW was active at the heart of the parliamentary campaign against slavery. I have not found any other newspaper articles mentioning this ‘conference’. However time has not allowed for further investigation.

Primary source for slavery conference on 3 March 1826:

- Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser, 4 March 1826. (BNA).

March 1838 Anti-slavery debate in Commons

The BBW was in London with anti-slavery delegates who were attending an important slavery debate in the Commons in March 1838. (Press report from Leeds Mercury, 31 March 1838). This report includes a comment saying the bishop ‘replied with emotion to the gentleman waiting on him – ‘How could I be a Christian, or how could I lay down my head in peace, if I should not be ready to vote for the immediate Abolition of Slavery?’ It is not clear if the Bishop attended the actual anti-slavery meeting in Exeter Hall, London, which is mentioned in this article, or whether he mingled among anti-slavery delegates in London.

Primary sources for March 1838 anti-slavery debate in Commons:

- Leeds Mercury, 31 March 1838. (BNA).

1842 Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilization of Africa

This organisation was set up in 1839 by Thomas Fowell Buxton, parliamentary leader of the anti-slavery campaign after Wilberforce. The organization attracted the support of lay and clergy members as well as abolitionists.³ The BBW was not listed as a member in 1839. On 21 June 1842 there was a public meeting of the society, at Exeter Hall in London, and the bishop’s

³ Roland Quinault, “Gladstone and Slavery”, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (2009), p.372.

name is among a number of bishops listed as Vice-Presidents. I cannot find evidence of his involvement after this. In the final years of his life, the bishop was unwell and died in 1845.⁴

Sources for Bishop Law's membership of the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade:

- 1839 First Report of the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade – paragraphs showing aims of the Society, (internetarchive.org).
- 1842 Report of the Committee for the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade, front page of report, (internetarchive.org).
- 1842 Report of the Committee for the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade, showing list of Vice Presidents, (internetarchive.org).
- Bishop's ill health, screenshot of the page where this is mentioned in memoirs by George Anthony Denison, brother of the Bishop of Salisbury who took over the work of the Bishop of Bath and Wells from 1843 until George Henry Law's death in 1845.⁵

Anti-slavery beliefs of Bishop's Law's father, Edmund Law

George Henry Law was the son of Edmund Law (1703 – 1787), Bishop of Carlisle from 1768 to 1787.⁶ He was among a group of abolitionist bishops, including Bishop Porteous, who worked with Granville Sharp to promote the abolition of slavery in the early 1780s.⁷ Edmund Law was a lifelong friend of William Paley, theologian and philosopher, who had strong anti-slavery views. Paley later wrote a biography of Edmund Law.⁸ Law persuaded Paley to publish a book in 1785, 'The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy', which made Paley's anti-slavery views clear. George Henry Law was in his teens and twenties when Paley was particularly active, and may have been influenced by his views. Paley's anti-slavery views are referenced by Thomas Clarkson in his own book on the abolition of slavery published in 1808.⁹

⁴ References to the ill health of Bishop Law during the early 1840s can be found in catalogue listings relating to the BBW at the South West Heritage Trust.

⁵George Anthony Denison, *Notes of my life 1805 – 1878*, (James Parker & Co., 1879), p. 93. (internetarchive.org).

⁶ Wikipedia entry on Edmund Law.

⁷ Letter dated 17 March 1781, Prince Hoare, *Memoir of Granville Sharp Esq.* (London: Henry Colburn, 1820), p. 189. (internetarchive.org).

⁸ William Paley, *A Short Memoir of the Life of Edmund Law*, (Chancery Lane, London: Davis, Taylor, and Wilks, 1800), p. 91, 94 and 465.

⁹ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African slave Trade by the British Parliament*, Vol. 1, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), p.485.

Richard Beadon, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1802 – 1824

(Life dates: 1737 – 1824)

Bishop Beadon was aged sixty-five when he became Bishop of Bath and Wells. There is evidence of some involvement with anti-slavery campaigns during the early years of his time in office. His later years coincided with a quieter period within the abolition movement which did not re-start again in earnest until 1823.

Member of The African Institution from 1807

Bishop Beadon was a member of The African Institution from the time it was set up in 1807. He was still a member in 1822, and may have continued until his death in 1824, but sources have not confirmed this. From 1823, much of the work of the organization was taken on by the newly formed Anti-Slavery Society. The African Institution was led by William Wilberforce and James Stephen and included all the leading parliamentary abolitionists of the day. It was set up one month after the 1807 Act which ended the British slave trade, but not the ownership of slaves. Part of its remit was to promote missionary work in Africa and to create a refuge for freed slaves in Sierra Leone in West Africa.¹⁰

At their initial meeting on 14 April 1807, the first of the ‘objects’ was as follows:

‘That this Meeting is deeply impressed with a sense of the enormous wrongs which the natives of Africa have suffered in their intercourse with Europe; and from a desire to repair those wrongs, as well as from general feelings of benevolence, is anxious to adopt such measures as are best calculate to promote their civilization and happiness.’¹¹

Primary sources showing the bishop’s membership of The African Institution:

- First report of The African Institution – title page (internetarchive.org).
- First report of The African Institution – Membership page (internetarchive.org).
- Objects of the Institution, Chapter 1, ‘Rules and Regulations of The African Institution: formed on 14th April 1807’. Published 1807 by William Phillips. Two screenshots of this chapter, p.9-11, (internetarchive.org).

¹⁰ More information on The African Institution can be found in *Rules and Regulations of the African Institution: Formed on 14th April 1807*. (London: William Phillips, 1807). (internetarchive.org).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

1807 Anti-slavery meeting

The Bishop was present at an anti-slavery meeting on 14 April 1807 held at Freemasons' Hall in London, a venue often used by the abolition movement. William Wilberforce and Granville Sharp were also at this event.

Primary sources for 1807 anti-slavery meeting:

- Morning Post, 17 April 1807. (BNA).

1808 Anti-slavery dinner/meeting

The Sun newspaper on 15 March 1808 gave notice of an event to be held on 25 March 1808.

'The Friends of the Abolition of the Slave Trade are invited to dine together at the Freemasons' Tavern, Great Queen-Street, Lincoln's Inn-Fields, on Friday, the 25th March, 1808, being the Anniversary of the day on which the Act for Abolishing the Slave Trade received the Royal Assent.'

The bishop is listed as one of the 'stewards' at the event, along with William Wilberforce, James Stephen, Earl Grey and George Canning.

Primary sources for 1808 anti-slavery dinner/meeting:

- Star (London) newspaper, 15 March 1808. (BNA).
- Star (London) newspaper, 15 March 1808, separate article announcing this event as a formal meeting. (BNA).

1805 Social Events with Abolitionist Figures

The Bishop attended an event at Gloucester Lodge, owned by the Duchess of Gloucester, likely to have been in 1805. This was also attended by the abolitionist Hannah More, and the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteous, who was a leading and outspoken abolitionist. (See below in Charles Moss research findings.) This is mentioned in a memoir of Hannah More's life written by William Roberts, which includes much of her correspondence. In a letter to her sister, Hannah More recalls this event, and having a conversation with the Duke of Gloucester about her new book, 'Hints to a Princess', which was published in 1805.¹² The letter is not dated but appears in this memoir amongst other letters written in 1805. The Duke of Gloucester was actively involved in anti-slavery campaigning over many years, and was President of The African Institution with which Bishop Beadon was also involved.

¹² William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*, (New York: Harper and Bros, 1836), p. 126. (internetarchive.org).

Hannah More Social Circle

Bishop Beadon appears to have been within the social circle of Hannah More. He and his wife visited her at her home, Barley Wood, in Somerset in 1805. Hannah More also corresponded with Bishop Beadon in relation to her work with the poor and providing education for children in the Mendip area.¹³ She also had a long and close friendship with Bishop Porteous.¹⁴

Primary source material for social events in 1805:

- Social event at 'Gloucester Lodge' – screen shot of Hannah More's letter about the event, p. 126 of William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*.
- Visit by Bishop Beadon and his wife to Barley Wood in 1805, p. 119, William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*.

Social events with slave-owning Codrington family

The Codrington family, based at Dodington House in Gloucestershire, were a wealthy and influential family who owned slave plantations in the West Indies. Bishop Beadon would doubtless have met them during his role as Bishop of Gloucester, (1789-1802), prior to his move to the diocese of Bath and Wells.

The *Globe* newspaper in December 1805 reports on a big social event at Dodington, with Bishop Beadon officiating at the christening of the son and heir to the Dodington estate. Another press report (not included here) shows that, during the same occasion, he consecrated the new church built on the Dodington estate.

Primary source material for Codrington connection:

- *Globe*, 15 December 1805. (BNA).

¹³ Hannah More's letters to Bishop Beadon are mentioned in Henry Thompson, *The Life of Hannah More, with Notices of her Sisters*, (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1838), p. 116 and 117. (internetarchive.org).

¹⁴ For an example of her letters to Bishop Porteous, see Thomas Taylor, *Memoir of Mrs Hannah More: with Notices of her Works, and Sketches of her Contemporaries*, (London: Joseph Rickerby, 1838), p.44.

Bishop Charles Moss, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1774 – 1802

(Life dates: 1711/12 – 1802)

Bishop Moss was in office during the first wave of the anti-slavery campaign in Britain during the 1780s and 90s. At this point much of the abolitionist activity was centred around non-conformist religious groups, in particular the Quakers. (William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson while not Quakers themselves had sympathies with the Quakers.) Such concerns about non-conformity may partly account for the Church establishment being wary of involvement in the early years of the abolition campaign. However, several senior religious figures were prepared to make their abolitionist views known. In particular the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteous, who gave an anti-slavery sermon in 1783 to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts which was published a year later and became a key piece of anti-slavery literature widely used by abolitionists. Anti-slavery campaigning was taking place during this time in Bath and the surrounding area. The years 1788 and 1792 were particularly notable for the large number of petitions against slavery which were sent to parliament from all around the country. For example, the Bath Chronicle on 8 March 1792 reports a petition made available at 'Messrs. Campbell and Gainsborough' for local inhabitants to sign.¹⁵ However I can find no evidence that the Bishop of Bath and Wells was involved in the town's anti-slavery activities at this time.

The bishops and abolitionist Granville Sharp

In the 1780s Bishop Porteous worked closely with abolitionist Granville Sharp to try to win support for their cause from the clergy. Granville Sharp recorded in his memoirs that in 1781 he was in touch with many of the bishops to request their support for his abolition work.¹⁶ It has not been possible to find any correspondence between Granville Sharp and Bishop Moss on this subject, despite enquiries to Lambeth Palace, Gloucestershire Archives and the South West Heritage Trust. However, it may be that more research may reveal a link. It is clear from this research project that Bishop Moss did work with Granville Sharp a few years later in 1786. Like many other English churchmen, Sharp was keen to introduce an English style episcopacy (hierarchical form of church government under the bishops) to America. When two American bishops came to England and were formally consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the two English bishops who were on hand at the occasion with Granville Sharp were Bishop Moss from Bath and Wells and Bishop Hinchcliffe, Bishop of Peterborough, who was one the abolitionist bishops working closely with Granville Sharp.¹⁷

¹⁵ Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 8 March 1792. (BNA).

¹⁶ Prince Hoare, *Memoir of Granville Sharp Esq.*, (London: Henry Colburn, 1820), p. 186-189. (internetarchive.org).

¹⁷ Frederick V. Mills Sr., "Granville Sharp and the Creation of an American Episcopate", *Anglican Episcopal History*, Vol. 79, No. 1, (March 2010), p. 34-58. Also see William White, *memoirs of the protestant episcopal Church in the United States of America*, (Philadelphia: S. Potter, 1820), p. 21 (internetarchive.org).

Sources relating to Granville Sharp and the bishops:

- Frederick V. Mills Sr., *Granville Sharp and the Creation of an American Episcopacy* (see footnote 17).
- Two screenshots from Granville Sharp memoirs showing his correspondence with bishops relating to abolition work. p. 186-189 (see footnote 16).

1777 social events with abolitionist figures

Like Bishop Beadon, Bishop Moss moved in social circles that included leading abolitionists of the day including Bishop Porteous and Hannah More. In a letter dating from around 1776, Hannah More records that she attended a dinner party hosted by leading literary socialite Mrs Fanny Boscawen.¹⁸ Among the guests were the Bishop of Bath and Wells and several people who were to become noted abolitionists, including Lady Scarsdale and Captain and Mrs Middleton.

Sources for 1776 social event:

- Page screenshot of letter from Hannah More, William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*, (New York: Harper and Bros, 1836), p. 61. (internetarchive.org).

Shareholder in the 'Colony of Virginia'

Bishop Moss appears to have been a shareholder in the British company running Virginia.¹⁹ It is not clear whether slaves were used on the Virginian plantations in question. His name is listed in the Parliamentary Register 1774 – 1780, in 'The Charters of the British Colonies in America.' The Bishop is listed along with numerous other high-ranking names, in a paragraph which has the note alongside it, 'Incorporation of the London or first colony by the name of 'The Treasurer and Company of Adventurers and planters of the City of London for the first colony in Virginia.'"²⁰

Conclusion and recommendations for further research

This research project has shown that there is plenty of evidence to support the view that Bishop Law was committed to the cause of anti-slavery. His own voice on the subject is clear through his speech in the House of Lords, his comments while presenting petitions and his comments reported in the press at public meetings in Bath. This research has not found any particular sermons by Bishop Law that focussed purely on the subject of slavery, although

¹⁸ William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*, (New York: Harper and Bros, 1836), p. 61. (internetarchive.org).

¹⁹ The Charters of the British Colonies in America, Parliamentary Register 1774 – 1780, accessed via Proquest, UK Parliamentary Papers

²⁰ Ibid., p.77.

they do confirm his belief in the importance of education. Like the leading anti-slavery campaigners of the day, including William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson and later Thomas Fowell Buxton, senior members of the Church hierarchy would have believed that the slaves in Britain's colonies needed to receive religious instruction and education before they could be freed. They would also have believed in the idea that civilised society had a natural order, and that slaves, even once they were free, would be at the lower end of this order.

As we have seen, it has not been possible to provide historical evidence to confirm that Charles Moss was among the bishops involved in the abolitionist work instigated by Granville Sharp in the early 1780s. (Although the father of Bishop Law was within this group of abolitionist bishops.) If such a link could be established, this would place all three of the bishops in office during the half century of the abolitionist movement, (approx. 1780 – 1838), on the side of anti-slavery. It is possible that connections do exist, but more detailed research, in person, at archives in London and various South-West based sites, may be required to uncover any firm links. Further research may also reveal more about the 'conference' that the Bishop of Bath and Wells attended in parliament on the subject of slavery on 3 March 1828. Time restraints within this research project have not allowed for further investigation of this event, but it seems likely that it would have been recorded in parliamentary documentation somewhere. Another area for further research may be an investigation into possible links between the Bishops of Bath and Wells and the abolition movement after 1845, when Bishop Bagot took over from Bishop Law. During the 1840s, 50s and 60s the abolition movement continued, with the aim of abolishing slavery beyond the British empire.

Alongside their anti-slavery interests, it is likely that the three Bishops of Bath and Wells that have been studied in this research had friends and acquaintances on both sides of the slavery debate. This is unsurprising given their position mixing with the highest levels of British society.

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