



Abolitionists at the Inn

By the Inner Temple Archivist, **Celia Pilkington**
and **Nicholas Griffin QC**

In December 2014, Anti-Slavery International commemorated "175 years against slavery" at the Inn, to mark the efforts made over nearly two centuries to eradicate the iniquitous trade in human beings. The commemoration coincided with the anniversary of the charity itself, which was founded in 1839 and is the world's oldest international human rights organisation. One of its parent bodies, the Agency Committee of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, was an early force in the campaign against slavery. It later evolved into the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. In 1990 it was refounded as Anti-Slavery International. It continues to combat slavery by highlighting the ever-present problem of people-trafficking and other forms of modern slavery worldwide, and by campaigning for the eradication of slavery in those countries where it remains prevalent – including the United Kingdom.

It is fitting that such an event should be held here, since the Inn is affiliated with distinguished members of the Abolitionist Movement. One of the best-known, Stephen Lushington (1782–1873), was called in 1806, served in Parliament from 1817–1841 and was Queen Caroline's counsel during her trial. He later became a judge of the Admiralty and was created a Privy Councillor. Along with other great abolitionists, he features in the 1866 monument to emancipation near the Palace of Westminster. His name appears on the roll of honour along with those of Wilberforce, Macaulay, Buxton and Brougham.

The Anti-Slavery Campaign was at first directed at the prohibition of the trade in human beings. This was outlawed in 1807 by The Slave Trade Act. Later the campaign focused on abolishing the culture of forced or unpaid labour – slavery itself – and this effort reached legal fruition in 1833 with The Slavery Abolition Act, due in large part to the work of Lushington.

From that date, slaves below the age of six were set free. Older slaves served an apprenticeship that led to their freedom in 1838 and 1840. This resulted in a mass emancipation across many of Britain's territorial possessions. Freedom was granted to 700,000 individuals in the West Indies, to 20,000 in Mauritius, and to 40,000 in South Africa.

Territories controlled by the East India Company and Ceylon were liberated from slavery in 1843 when they became part of the British Empire.

Lushington had spoken against slavery from the early years of the 19th Century and he voted for the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. He was also largely responsible for the Act of 1824, which outlawed the trade in slaves between British colonies.

He attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention, which was held here in London at Freemasons Hall on the 12 June 1840. This was organised by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. It contained delegates from all over the world.

Meanwhile the struggle continued on other fronts. For many years after 1833, the trade continued under the flags of nations that lay outside British jurisdiction. Lushington played an active and important role in the campaign to suppress this trade. He presided over a committee in 1842 that drew up a code of instructions for British naval officers. He also concluded a treaty with France on this question in 1845.

In 1838, he met the American republican senator Charles Sumner, an early campaigner for abolition in America, and subsequently befriended him.

Others connected with the Inn who have played important roles in fighting slavery include:

Anti-Slavery convention, 1840,
by Benjamin Robert Haydon

James Scotland (1774–1849), proprietor and editor of *The Antigua Free Press*, he was admitted to the Inn in 1793 but was never called. Nauseated by the system of slavery on which the economy of Antigua relied, he altered the pro-slavery stance of *The Antigua Free Press* and campaigned for the emancipation of slaves, and for the political rights of the 'free-coloureds', or freed slaves. His persuasive articles led Henry Loving, editor of the island's rival paper, the *Weekly Press*, to join the fight to establish rights for slaves. Soon, no editor on the island was representing the opinions of white plantation owners. They swiftly took their revenge. Henry Loving was publicly horse-whipped and James Scotland served a spell in prison. When slavery was abolished in 1834, Scotland resigned as editor. In 1840, he became Deputy Postmaster General of Antigua.

Sir Stephen Cave (1820–1880), a member of this Inn, he was called in 1846 and later became a member of the Western Circuit. He served as MP for Shoreham, Paymaster General and Vice President of the Board of Trade. He published many pamphlets criticising the slave trade. He

which once before declared itself in a voice to which no minister can be deaf, and which no man who watches the signs of the times can misunderstand."

Less praiseworthy was William Burge, Treasurer of the Inn in 1844-5 and Jamaican Attorney General, who was described as "*Jamaica's British lobbyist who had earned the contempt of the abolitionists ... with his strong defence of slavery ...*"

It is thanks to dedicated lawmakers, including the significant role played by our own Master Butler-Sloss in the House of Lords, and the campaigning of organisations such as Anti-Slavery International, that this country now has The Modern Slavery Act 2015. It is an important piece of legislation, which seeks to consolidate and simplify pre-existing slavery and trafficking offences, and which increases the maximum sentence in relation to those offences to life imprisonment. The Act introduces civil orders to restrict the activity of those who pose a risk and those convicted of slavery and trafficking offences and creates the role of the new Anti-Slavery Commissioner, intended to galvanise law enforcement's efforts to tackle modern slavery. The Act is not perfect, but it is ambitious in parts, and, for example, includes provisions in relation to supply chains. It requires businesses with annual

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illuminated the effects of the 1846 Sugar Bill, which freed up the trade in sugar and ended the tariffs that protected sugar from the West Indies. This led to cheaper imported sugar from the slave-owning societies of Cuba and Haiti. William Wilberforce calculated that every ton of sugar harvested required one new slave. Sir Stephen Cave published a pamphlet protesting against the Sugar Bill entitled *A Few Words on the Encouragement Given to Slavery and the Slave Trade by Recent Measures, and Chiefly by the Sugar Bill of 1846* (1849). In it he asked:

"What has become of that horror of slavery, which induced at one period 300,000 persons in England, to renounce the use of sugar in order to keep themselves pure from the guilt of that system of which they had so long and so earnestly sought termination. Where is that ardour in the cause of freedom, which in one session 1831, poured into Parliament, no less than 4,584 petitions on its behalf.

Let them all unite to wipe away the stain from their common country. Let them again rouse the deep and solemn feeling, the absolute and irresistible determination,

revenues of £36m or more to publish an annual slavery and human-trafficking statement setting out what steps have been taken to ensure their supply chains are slavery-free. The Act received Royal Assent in March and important elements of the Act were brought into force on 31/7/15.

Which brings us back to the commemoration in the Hall of 175 years of Anti-Slavery International's existence. It is a sobering thought that the work of organisations such as this remains current and necessary so long after the 'abolition' of the slave trade and of slavery. As Aidan McQuade, Director of the charity, said on the night:

"Yet more work is required internationally to ensure that slavery eradication is recognised as fundamental to poverty reduction and advancing human development, and to ensure that those who are struggling for freedom across the globe are offered solidarity and meaningful support and not merely warm words and empty sentiment."

Celia Pilkington and Nicholas Griffin QC

Further information about Anti-Slavery International can be found on its website, www.antislavery.org