

Campaigning for the abolition of slavery



Tobacco box lid,
Manchester Art Gallery



Cup and saucer with sugar
cane and cotton flowers,
Gallery Oldham



Sugar castor,
Manchester Art Gallery



Anti-slavery pincushion,
Manchester Art Gallery



Token, 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother', 1787
© People's History Museum

Token, 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother', 1787

People's History Museum

This token was made in 1787 for the first anti-slavery organisation set up by Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson. It shows a chained African man, naked and kneeling, surrounded by the words 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother'. The reverse has two hands joined in friendship.

The kneeling image and the motto 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother' became the symbols of the anti-slavery movement. The image was created by Josiah Wedgwood who was an **abolitionist** and also ran a pottery company. It showed enslaved Africans as passive as if they accepted slavery. Many enslaved Africans resisted slavery and escaped. They showed courage, **ingenuity** and determination to end slavery.

The symbol was copied on anti-slavery leaflets, and used to decorate medallions, men's snuff

and tobacco boxes, ladies' bracelets and hair pins, as well as other everyday household ceramics including milk jugs, tea sets and sugar bowls, many of which were produced by Josiah Wedgwood's pottery company. This spread the anti-slavery message widely.

In Britain opinion was divided over the issue of slavery. The British state (including the royal family and the church) and many rich landowners and businessmen initially supported slavery. Their wealth depended on it. Many ordinary people, especially women, saw that it was against basic human rights and campaigned to bring it to an end. There was a lot of anti-slavery support in and around Greater Manchester. The British slave trade was made illegal in 1807.



Breakfast service made by Wedgwood, 1785
© Gallery Oldham

Breakfast service made by Wedgwood, 1785

Gallery Oldham

This breakfast service shows many connections to slavery. It was made by Josiah Wedgwood. Wedgwood was an **abolitionist** and produced the design 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?' showing a kneeling enslaved African begging for freedom.

The set includes a sugar bowl. There was a huge growth in **consumption** of sugar in Britain during the 1700s. Sugar was grown on **plantations** in the Caribbean by millions of enslaved Africans working in appalling conditions. They often worked from early morning to late in the night and cutting and boiling sugar cane was extremely hard and dangerous work.

Sugar started off as a luxury but soon became a basic part of the British diet. It was used to sweeten puddings as well as drinks such as tea, coffee and chocolate.

Rum was also produced from slave-grown sugar and became a very popular drink. Rum was given to sailors as well as to enslaved Africans on ships crossing the Atlantic.

This breakfast service was owned by British prime minister, William Gladstone. His father, John Gladstone, had large sugar plantations in Jamaica and British Guiana (now Guyana) and received nearly £100,000 in **compensation** when slavery was finally abolished. The enslaved people who had worked on his **plantations** received nothing.

This breakfast service came from the Lees family who founded Oldham's art gallery. They made their fortune in the cotton industry, which depended on raw slave-grown cotton from plantations in the USA, until the abolition of slavery in 1865.



Bust of John Bright, 1867
© Touchstones Rochdale

Bust of John Bright, 1867

Touchstones Rochdale

John Bright was born in Rochdale in 1811. He and his brothers took over the family cotton spinning mill at Cronkeyshaw in 1839. It became one of the biggest mills in Rochdale.

The Bright family were Quakers, a religious movement that believed in **pacifism** and **equality** for all. Bright was active in politics all his life, becoming an MP for Durham, Manchester and Birmingham.

Although Bright made his money from cotton, he was, like most Quakers, strongly anti-slavery. He supported Abraham Lincoln in the American Civil War and the fight against slavery. Bright and Rochdale MP Richard Cobden regularly wrote letters of support to President Abraham Lincoln. They became known among politicians in parliament as 'the two members for the United States'.

Bright had enormous influence in the north west of England and found strong support among the working people of Rochdale against slavery. Frederick Douglass, an African American who escaped slavery, described John Bright and Richard Cobden in his 1883 autobiography, as 'friendly to the loyal and progressive spirit which abolished slavery'.

Although Bright strongly opposed slavery he didn't support the end of child labour in Lancashire mills. He argued that many families relied on child labour for their survival. He also refused to contribute to the poor relief fund for Rochdale during the cotton famine. Instead he offered his workers loans which they could barely afford to repay.

Questions

- 1 Who was involved in the **abolition** movement in the north west of England and why?
- 2 Why was John Bright anti-slavery when he owned a cotton spinning mill?
- 3 What methods did **abolitionists** use to get support?
- 4 When were enslaved people finally free in British **colonies**?
- 5 What types of campaigns are successful today?