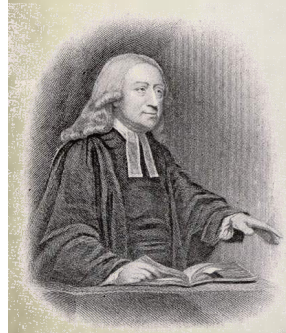


WILLIAM WILBERFORCE



Born in 1759 to a life of privilege and wealth, William Wilberforce had an easy ride into the English Parliament -- becoming the elected representative for Kingston-upon-Hull at the age of 21. Eloquent, charming and cashed-up he was a rich boy destined for a job on the front bench. Before him lay a long, happy and interesting life as a ruling elite.



Things took an unexpected turn when Wilberforce converted to Christianity after being spiked by the revivalist, John Wesley. With an awakened moral compass he set about doing good works, in 1787 founding a society with a charter for 'the reformation of public manners'. The trouble began when it occurred to Wilberforce a good place to start reforming public manners might be the abolition of human slavery.

By all accounts his 1788 parliamentary speech on the subject was a slam-dunk, greeted by hearty cheers. Everyone agreed slavery was an abhorrent practice. Meeting no opposition it seemed right to Wilberforce the next step should be a bill banning it, put to the vote.

However, the forces making money by slavery caught wind and immediately sent stooges around to stop the crazy talk. What seemed a straight-forward proposition turned into a Chinese puzzle. Votes were delayed, proposals white anted, expert testimony called for, amendments moved, subcommittees formed. Months turned into years. The economic forces marshalled against Wilberforce took pleasure in not just frustrating his project but also destroying his career. Once seen as a future Prime Minister, William Wilberforce was made out to be less than sane. Such was the force of malice aimed at him that even John Wesley is reported to have told him to ease up - unless he was convinced God had spoken to him.



Undeterred, Wilberforce persisted. It cost Wilberforce his looks and youth...but on July 26, 1833, forty five years after he first spoke out, the Emancipation Bill abolishing slavery received its final reading in Parliament.

Three days later Wilberforce died at age 74. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, finally receiving the acclaim due him.

see [Wilberforce's monuments](#)