

Bath, from Roman to Georgian Bath, promoted the idea of indulgence and health throughout society and the evidence for this is promoted and celebrated throughout the city, including the Circus, Crescent and even the Roman Baths. Bath was a Georgian spa town, dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure which made attracted rich and fashionable society like absentee plantation owners who indulged their profits in the city. The medicinal qualities of the waters became well known and as affluent visitors flocked to the city, the expectation of entertainment and a grand social life were met. The history of which still attracts tourists to the city even today, with attractions such as the Roman Baths as popular and advertised as widely as ever. However, despite being only miles from the busy trading port of Bristol, there does not seem to be any evidence for commemorating slavery, accepting any blame or even celebrating an abolition meeting that occurred in the cities Assembly rooms in 1832.

In 1832 22<sup>nd</sup> of October a meeting was held in the Assembly Rooms, Bath, to petition for 'the speedy and total abolition of slavery'. It had a full attendance and the Bishop of Bath and Wells began the proceedings where he stated that 'slavery is opposed to the whole tenor and spirit of Christian code.' He also told his peers that he believed that the freed slaves would need previous preparation and instruction to ensure that they could enjoy their freedom and even approved the notion of compensation. He thought that when the slaves were set free the 'foul blot which now attached to the character of the Christian people shall be washed away by the full and final abolition of negro slavery.' The Bishop then stepped down and Rev J.B Jervoise had his turn to speak but was faced attempted disturbances by interruptions, clamour and hisses by those who 'had fixed themselves on the sinister side of the platform'.

William Wilberforce's speech that followed (recorded in the Bath and Cheltenham Gazette) began with the question: 'how could I but wish once more to raise my feeble voice and however faintly to advocate that good cause for which I have so often pleaded and for the success of which my heart will never cease to feel deeply to the latest moment of my rational existence!.. It is one in which you imitate the example and act in the spirit of your Divine master exercising humanity at once to the bodies and souls of men- like Him, who first fed the hungry.' He then went on to that 'there never was a greater mass of misery to be terminated, or a greater amount of good to be conferred than by the measure which we are now met together to support.' Wilberforce also explains that despite popular opinion that the movement was against individual acts of cruelty of which 'I could tell such tales of individual injury and suffering as would cause the heart of any feeling man to bleed within him. But it is the system that we wish to change. It has always been our charge that the slaves, generally speaking are over worked and underfed.' Wilberforce goes on to say that 'I am ashamed thus to dwell on the bodily grievances of the slave: great as they are, comparatively speaking they are the least of his injuries. The Negroes are our fellow creatures, immortal beings like

ourselves. It is in this higher character that I am now contending for their rights. That they should no longer be strangers.' Wilberforce, explains that the cost of one man's pain makes no sense to make another wealthy 'I could not conceive it possible that it could be requisite to retain any particular race of men in continued suffering and degradation, in order to provide the affluence and for the improvement of the resources of another set of creatures of the same Almighty hand.' He then explains that he believes that 'the trade now hangs by a thread and the ship owner will infallibly be ruined' and that he 'will prevail on Parliament no longer to delay the strike of the setters of the slave, and not bringing him to the enjoyment of the just rights of his nature.' Various others were also called forward to give their opinion against slavery and the slave trade, one William Miller gave various case studies against slavery. Another man, Mr Wildman, a proprietor stated with passion 'I advocate immediate emancipation because it is just. The advocacy of gradual emancipation, in my opinion, involves itself a sin. If slavery be a sin, we have no right to tolerate it for a moment; if it be not a sin we have no right to tough it. I say that slavery is a sin.' Mr Wildman is reported to be the most anxious, religious and conscientious proprietor, however still a proprietor.

The assembly rooms however have no remembrance painting, plaques or statues for this meeting, something that should be celebrated. Instead the nearest the rooms get is a statue in the Assembly rooms garden dedicated to 'Arthur Philips' an adventurer who was sent to Australia and stated that the lands he was in will never have any slavery, a quote in scripted into the bronze. It seems odd that the positive history for the abolition of slavery is ignored as much as the act of the trade and slavery itself, as if Bath wishes to wash away that negativity but still celebrate the wealth and fashion that the money of the trade help create. Tourism celebrates these things of beauty without questioning where the wealth came from to create the Georgian city of Bath. The Assembly rooms seems to include nothing of its own history except for a 'fashion museum' downstairs and a small electronic screen stating that the rooms are a beautiful location for parties, business meetings, wedding etc but completely forgets to mention what the rooms were used for almost two hundred years ago.