

The Quakers

- Quakers were the first religious denomination on either side of the Atlantic to come out against slavery. There were only some 20,000 Quakers in Britain in the late 18th century, but they supplied nine of the 12 members of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded in 1787.
- The first meeting of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade took place in the London Quaker bookstore and printing shop. An all-Quaker abolition committee had actually been started four years earlier but widespread prejudice in Britain against religious dissenters meant that it did not attract public attention until it joined forces with like-minded Anglicans
- The network of Quakers around the country were the core of the local antislavery committees organised by Thomas Clarkson. Clarkson himself once said he felt 'nine parts in ten' a Quaker, but politically it was more sensible for him to remain an Anglican. Clarkson and others were much influenced by the writings of the early Quaker abolitionist Anthony Benezet, who, like many Quakers, spent time in both Britain and America.
- Other key Quaker figures in the antislavery movement included Elizabeth Heyrick, businessman Joseph Sturge who travelled to investigate conditions in the West Indies - and his sister Sophia, who personally called on 3,000 households to ask them not to eat slave-grown sugar. The Quaker John Woolman campaigned against slavery on both sides of the Atlantic, and his 1754 tract was one of the very first written against slavery.