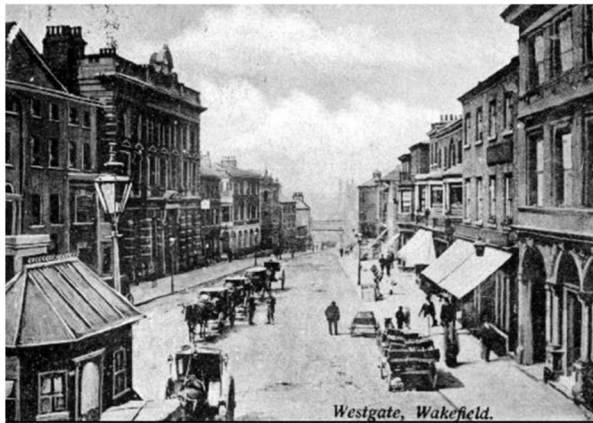


FORGOTTEN WOMEN OF WAKEFIELD

PRaise FOR THE LADIES ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY ELIZABETH DAWSON

Westgate, in its heyday was noted by Curwen as having 'the noblest appearance of any (he) ever saw out of London'. The Ladies Anti-Slavery Society formally constituted in 1857 with Elizabeth Dawson as secretary, ran regular meetings here thus keeping the question of Abolition front and centre within Wakefield's most exclusive neighbourhood.



Westgate, Wakefield.

31 LADIES LEAD THE WAY

BY SARAH LEAH COBHAM
BASED ON RESEARCH BY HELGA FOX

Forgotten Women from Wakefield continued to fight against slavery after Ann Hurst, the newspaper owner and proprietor responsible for bringing the horrors of slavery to the population through her publication, *The Wakefield & Halifax Journal*, died in 1832.

Over the next 30 years, women from Wakefield continued to campaign for justice on behalf of their slave sisters and brothers still bound in chains. The rise of the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society is set against the backdrop of significant events happening in Wakefield that directly affected the attitude and actions of Elizabeth Dawson.

As the movement against slavery gained momentum, women were deliberately and resolutely excluded from the campaign by Abolitionist leader William Wilberforce.



In 1825 William Wilberforce made it clear that he disliked what he felt were militant actions by women when they 'met, to publish, to go from house to house stirring up petitions- these appear to me proceedings unsuited to the female character as delineated in Scripture.'

Wilberforce refused to acknowledge female signatures on petitions and banned male members of existing anti-slavery societies from speaking at emerging Ladies Anti-Slavery Societies.

Women from Wakefield rejected this premise entirely.

TIMELINE

- 1820 Elizabeth Dawson born Wakefield 4th October & baptised Salem Chapel George Street 1st December 1820
- 1829 Ann Mary Edmonstone (a woman of colour) marries Charles Waterton
The Wakefield & Halifax Journal is listed in the London and County directory & Wakefield holds its first Abolitionist meeting. Ann Waterton (nee Edmonstone) dies in childbirth
- 1830 A Ladies Anti-Slavery petition is presented to Parliament. It is too large to be displayed on a table.
- 1833 According to Henry Clarkson, a negro boy is used at the Borough Election to show that Mr Lascelles, representing Lord Harewood, has links to slavery.
- 1835 Wakefield Temperance Society is formed giving women a public speaking platform.
- 1840 World Anti-Slavery Meeting in London where it is voted that women were not allowed to participate.
- 1841 Wakefield men are dismissing calls to support the sugar boycott instigated by Elizabeth Heyrick in Leicester.
- 1842 Money raised by anti-slavery campaigners sent to London.
- 1847 Pablo Fanque's Circus on Wood Street
Fredrick Douglass gives an anti-slavery lecture at The Corn Exchange
- 1848 Wakefield's first mayor, George William Harrison, is elected. He is a staunch anti-slavery and a teetotaler.
- 1851 Westgate Chapel blocked pro-slavery speakers. Reverend Higginson led a national anti-slavery campaign in the non-conformist press.
- 1853 Harriet Beecher Stowe on a lecture tour. A play based on her book, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' is performed at Wakefield Theatre. Charles Waterton dismisses her claims about the situation faced by the negroes in America. Eliza & Helen Edmonstone wish to leave Wakefield.
- 1857 Wakefield Ladies Anti-Slavery Society officially constituted. Elizabeth Dawson as secretary.
- 1860 Sarah Parker Remond & Fredrick Douglass speak at The Corn Exchange. Wakefield Anti-Slavery Association established. Elizabeth Dawson Secretary.



FORGOTTEN WOMEN OF WAKEFIELD

ELIZABETH DAWSON

BY SARAH LEAH COBHAM

Women pushed back against the prejudices levied against them and used their skills and influence to create protests through the use of jewellery, pottery and poetry. These creative responses to their own oppression highlighted their vital role in the anti-slavery movement and galvanised actions from loyal foot soldiers like Elizabeth Dawson who petitioned, leafleted, published and spoke passionately in halls, churches and on street corners. The 'Am I not a Woman & a Sister' campaign, which began in 1830 and which deliberately aped the 'Am I not a Man & a Brother' slogan adopted by abolitionists in 1787, was used by women involved in Ladies Anti-Slavery societies to influence the decision makers of the time. Brooches, cameos and tea cups declaring support for the anti-slavery movement enabled women to be active, not passive protesters within their own cities and towns. Unlike the suffragist 'Votes for Women' movement that began in earnest in 1860 and was led, on the whole by women from the upper classes, ladies in the anti-slavery societies tended to be more from backgrounds where their families were not involved in or benefitting from slavery.

A reimagined banner of the Wakefield & Halifax Journal by artist Shannon Wishon of Dream Time Creative. Note Ann Hurst's tea rooms do not offer sugar but rather, locally sourced honey. Tea was not originally linked to the slave trade, but rather sweetening tea with sugar amplified the slave trade.

In 1824 Elizabeth Heyrick of Leicester calls for a complete boycott on sugar and an immediate not gradual abolition. William Wilberforce bans women being active members of the anti-slavery movement and bans men from speaking at women's meetings.



By 1840 resistance against the women's movement was such that it was voted, at The World Anti-Slavery convention in London that women were, 'allowed to watch and listen from the spectators gallery but not take part.' This was opposed by many factors within the movement and fuelled the question of equal suffrage across the land.



Elizabeth Dawson, a non-conformist, was just 20 years old when her sisters' voices were oppressed in London however, she was a frequent visitor to, and by the age of 37, lived in a city that was buzzing with Abolitionist activity centred around the Westgate Unitarian Chapel. Women of colour were living at Waterton Hall as Ladies. Helen & Eliza Edmonstone, sisters-in-law to Charles Waterton walked freely about Wakefield as women were taking to pulpits to galvanise the Temperance movement into action. Clara Clarkson was involved in anti-slavery with strong links to the Ladies Sheffield branch and by the time Elizabeth was 26, the great Frederick Douglas had spoken, for the first time, at The Corn Exchange, about the horrors he had experienced first hand, as a slave.



Illustration by Zainab Jode

To James McDonnold
CHIEF CONSTABLE OF WAKEFIELD

LADIES OF WAKEFIELD SEEK TO HIGHLIGHT THE ROLE WOMEN OF THIS TOWN PLAY IN THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT AND WISH TO RECRUIT MEMBERS IN ORDER TO FORMALISE THE EXISTING WAKEFIELD LADIES ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY AND ADOPT A CONSTITUTION FOR THE ABOLITION & IMMEDIATE CESSATION OF SLAVERY.

Miss Elizabeth Dawson-Secretary	Mrs Alfred Spence	Mrs Wm. Hartley Lee
Mrs Camidge	Mrs James Micklethwaite	Mrs Stocks
Mrs Dibb	Mrs Kitching	Mrs Russell
Mrs Harrison	Mrs George Lee	Miss Smith
Mrs Clayton	Miss Sharpe	Miss Clara Clarkson
	Miss Case	Mrs Madden

IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE ABOVE REGISTRATION WE HEREBY APPOINT A

MEETING

TO BE HELD AT THE MUSIC SALON WAKEFIELD

On Wednesday next, the 31st instant
AT TWELVE O'CLOCK AT NOON.
March 1857

.....
West Yorkshire Printing Co. Broad Street Wakefield

This creative interpretation by the DTC team of a flyer The Ladies Anti-Slavery Society may have published (and is based on the 1830 leaflet published by Ann Hurst) includes the actual names of 17 of the 31 Ladies who went onto form part of the 1860 Anti-Slavery Association in Wakefield. We can therefore assume these women formally constituted Wakefield's first Ladies Anti-Slavery Society in 1857.

FORGOTTEN WOMEN OF WAKEFIELD

ELIZABETH DAWSON

BY SARAH LEAH COBHAM

By 1851, when Elizabeth was just 31, Wakefield had elected its first mayor, George William Harrison who, as a staunch anti-slavery supporter and Teetotaler directly enabled the emboldening of increasingly enlightened voices. Westgate Chapel blocked pro slavery speakers whilst Reverend Higgingson, led a national anti-slavery campaign in the non conformist press. Simultaneously, women became increasingly visible and proactive in the anti-slavery campaign. Their actions played a vital role so much so that Sir George Stephen fellow Abolitionist leader disagreed with Wilberforce on this issue and claimed that women's energy was essential in the success of the movement.

"Ladies Associations did everything... They circulated publications; they procured the money to publish; they talked, coaxed and lectured; they got up public meetings and filled our halls and platforms when the day arrived; they carried round petitions and enforced the duty of signing them... In a word they formed the cement of the whole anti-slavery building - without their aid we never should have kept standing."

1853

1853 was a pivotal year when several events came together which highlighted deep divisions and attitudes towards slavery.

It began with the invitation by the Scottish Ladies Anti-Slavery society to deliver a lecture tour about her novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, across Great Britain. Using the extensive and vibrant Ladies network, Harriet visited numerous cities, including Leeds. Where she wasn't available, substitute speakers such as the Reverend M Dillon spoke to raise her profile.



35,000 FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA.
A LECTURE on SLAVERY in connection with the admirable work of Mrs Harriet Beecher Stowe, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*," will be delivered in the Courthouse, Wood-street, on Monday, December 19th, at seven o'clock in the evening by Rev. M. M. DILLON, Rector of Dominick.

The Lecture will have special reference to a Mission which has been organized under the immediate patronage of the Earl of Shaftesbury, Sir Edward Buxton, Bart., Earl of Carlisle, Hon. Arthur Kinnaird, with a view of evangelising the 35,000 fugitive slaves who have taken refuge in British ground, and which under God, will tend to effect a general if not an universal emancipation of 2,000,000 of our fellow creatures, held in the cruel bonds of slavery in the United States, more than any plan as yet devised in England or America.

Wakefield, Dec. 13th, 1853.

The Abolitionist movement continued to be highly visible with adaptations at Wakefield theatre of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was about this time, Eliza and Helen Edmonstone, sisters-in-law of Charles Waterton, and women of colour decided to leave Wakefield after an incident.

WAKEFIELD THEATRE —During the past week, the drama of "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*," founded upon the celebrated work of Mrs Beecher Stowe has been performed nightly with great success at this place of entertainment. On Monday and Tuesday evenings the performances concluded with *Robert Macaire*; on Wednesday *Hamlet* commenced the evening; Thursday evening's amusement, was commenced with *The Fyre Mayde of Wakefield*, followed by *The Daughter of the Regiment*, concluding with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Last evening *Douglas* was the first piece, which was followed by the interlude of the *Daughter of the Regiment*. The entertainments have been varied by the introduction of several new *pas* by Madlle. Emilie Grahn. Generally speaking the company have acquitted themselves well in their various characters. We refer our readers to the advertisement of to-night's entertainment in another column.



Showing how slavery improves the condition of the female sex.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* highlighted the appalling conditions slaves faced and created division amongst the elite. This may have been because Mrs Stowe was also an advocate of female suffrage and therefore was a dangerous and powerful voice representing women's rights at a time when women had few, and their slave sisters had none.

Charles Waterton writes about Harriet Beecher Stowe in his letters to George Ord from Walton Hall October 8th 1853,

'So, at last you canting, cunning calumniating Mrs. Beecher Stowe and her holy husband have left your grandfather's meadows to pass the evening of her life in the well cultivated fields of the United States! She has the art of humbug at her finger ends. I was in Leeds the other day when she was to receive money and thanks at a public meeting from the Mayor of the Borough. I was invited to the farce but I would not go. Having just dipped into that lying romance, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I soon saw that it is a made up book, and I am sure it contains much of the old trash, in a new dress, that used to be sent to Sir Fowell Buxton, (1) on slavery. I strongly suspect that Mrs. Stowe is not the entire author of '*Tom's Cabin*'. There have been more hands and heads than one or two at work on it.'

Waterton took charge of the slave plantations owned by his father, uncle and brother based in British Guiana, near George Town and managed them between 1805 and 1812 but claimed, in later years that 'he never possessed a slave, in my life.' He was also vociferous in his opinions that slaves were treated well by their owners - perhaps a reflection of his own management of the Waterton Slave Plantations.

(1) Sir Fowell Buxton was a leading Abolitionist, Quaker and leader of the RSPCA who took over the leadership of the anti-slavery movement when Wilberforce retired in 1825. He was instrumental in influencing the government with petitions and a resolution condemning the state of slavery as 'repugnant to the principles of the British constitution and of the Christian religion', and called for its gradual abolition 'throughout the British colonies'. He also pressured the government to send dispatches to the colonies to improve the treatment of slaves.



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FORGOTTEN WOMEN OF WAKEFIELD

ELIZABETH DAWSON

BY SARAH LEAH COBHAM

Whilst there is little print evidence of Elizabeth's direct involvement in the activities of a growing group of women fighting against slavery before 1857, it is not unrealistic to assume that she had been heavily involved in the movement for some time. It was only when the women felt ready for that next step, did they adopt a constitution which is where we find Elizabeth, at the heart of it. She is the secretary of Wakefield's first, formal, Ladies Anti-Slavery Society.

Adopting the constitution of the Sheffield branch, the same branch Clara Clarkson had attended a lecture from in 1832, their influence was such that they were able to invite important speakers to Wakefield's Music Saloon. No longer only reported in the pro-abolitionist press, their speaker programme made it into the mainstream. Elizabeth, as secretary, would have been organising all this and ensuring its success.

Herald Friday 19th March 1858

BRITISH ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENTS.

WAKEFIELD LADIES' ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

A MEETING of ladies was held in the Music Saloon, Wakefield, on the 31st March 1857, at which Miss Griffiths, Corresponding Secretary of the Rochester (U.S.) Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, gave interesting details of the proceedings of that Society, and of the aspects of Slavery at the present time. It was decided to form an Anti-Slavery Society among the Ladies of Wakefield, and to adopt the Constitution of the Shemeld Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association.*

Thirty-one ladies gave their names as members of the Society.

ELIZABETH DAWSON, Sec.

Anti Slavery Reporter Friday 1st May 1857

LADIES' ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.—On Friday evening last, a meeting of the above society was held in the Music Saloon, Dr Bewglass presiding. The Rev R. F. Carpenter delivered a lecture on slavery. Mr W. H. Lee read the report for the past year, and addresses were delivered by the Rev E. Higginson, Dr Perrey, and Mr W. Kitchen. The proceedings terminated by a vote of thanks to the chairman.

Such an interest and momentum had been created, that in 1860 Sarah Parker Remond, a woman of colour, international activist for human rights and women's suffrage, on tour from America agreed to speak to the people of Wakefield. Fredrick Douglas, a former slave and American social reformer, abolitionist, orator, writer, and statesman, who had visited and spoken passionately about the horrors of Slavery once before in 1847, joined her. There is little doubt who was behind that invitation. The Ladies Anti-Slavery Society was the only active society at that time, as our reimagined letter (below) suggests. Sarah and Fredrick spoke to a packed audience at The Corn Exchange, a testament to their hard work and dedication.

The rhetoric of the visitors was so powerful, the message so important, that it was decided to establish a new Anti-Slavery Association, one which included the whole of the town, regardless of gender, in order to amplify the work done by the 31 women previously. Elizabeth Dawson was elected as Secretary of Wakefield's first mixed gendered Anti-Slavery Association, a testament to her years of work for this vital and significant cause.

PROACTIVE CAMPAIGN

Advertisement.

ROCHESTER LADIES' ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

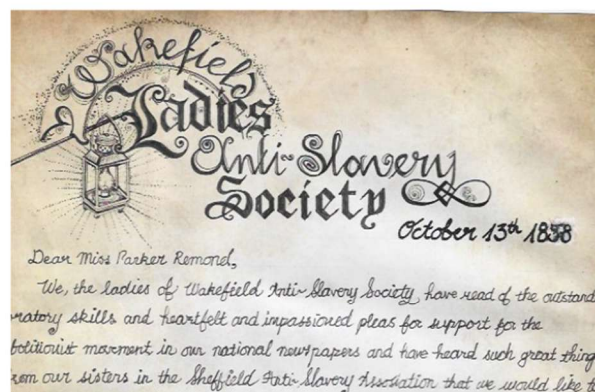
We have been requested to insert the following notice, from F. Douglas's Paper of the 25th September ultimo:—

In behalf of the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, the Treasurer gratefully acknowledges the reception of the following donations. The ladies, in the midst of their continued labours, sincerely appreciate the tangible evidences of sympathy which they receive from their Trans-Atlantic friends.

MARIA PORTER, Treasurer.

Donations on behalf of the Rochester Society.

Mansfield Anti-Slavery Society	do.	do.	3	0	0
Wakefield do.	do.	do.	3	0	0
Sheffield do.	do.	do.	5	0	0
Rotherham do.	do.	do.	7	0	0
Huddersfield do.	do.	do.	6	0	0
Barnsley do.	do.	do.	7	0	0
Clogher do.	do.	do.	10	0	0



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PAGE FOUR

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