



Joseph Milner

Joseph Milner (1744–1797), was born in Leeds and educated at Leeds Grammar School and Catharine Hall, Cambridge. Milner became headmaster of Hull Grammar School in 1767. There his pupils included Samuel Marsden, George Pryme, Thomas Perronet Thompson, Peter William Watson, his brother Isaac and William Wilberforce.

In 1770, Joseph became a follower of the rising Evangelical school and was suspected of being a supporter of the Methodist movement. In 1797 he became the vicar of Holy Trinity, mainly through the efforts of William Wilberforce. Unfortunately, Milner fell ill and died in November 1797. He was the shortest serving Minister of this church. He was buried in Holy Trinity Church where there is a monument in his memory.

Joseph had a reputation particularly for his work on *The History of the Church of Christ* (1794–1809).

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Isaac Milner

Isaac Milner FRS (11 January 1750 – 1 April 1820, aged 70) was a mathematician, an inventor, the President of Queens' College, Cambridge and Lucasian Professor of Mathematics. Milner was born in Mabgate, Leeds. He began his education at a grammar school in Leeds in 1756, but this ended in 1760 with the death of his father. His elder brother, Joseph now the headmaster at Hull Grammar School, invited Isaac to become the School's usher, where he met William Wilberforce.

He was instrumental in the 1785 religious conversion of Wilberforce to a more vital form of Christianity, with an emphasis on personal salvation. Isaac was a great supporter of the abolitionists' campaign against the slave trade, giving Wilberforce his assurance before the 1789 parliamentary debate. Historians have argued that this led directly to Wilberforce later becoming the leading British figure in the campaign to abolish the slave trade.

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Samuel Marsden

Samuel Marsden (25 June 1765 – 12 May 1838, aged 72) was born in Farsley, Yorkshire the son of a Wesleyan blacksmith turned farmer, Marsden attended the village school and spent some years assisting his father on the farm. With a scholarship from the Elland Society, Marsden attended Hull Grammar School, where he became associated with Joseph Milner and William Wilberforce.

After two years, he matriculated, at the age of 25, at Magdalene College, Cambridge. Marsden was offered the position of second chaplain to the Reverend Richard Johnson's ministry in the Colony of New South Wales on 1 January 1793. In 1800 Marsden succeeded Johnson and became the senior Church of England chaplain in New South Wales; he would keep this post until his death in 1838.

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George Pryme

George Pryme (4 April 1781 – 2 December 1868, aged 87) was born in 1781 in Cottingham, East Riding of Yorkshire, the only surviving child of merchant Christopher Pryme and his wife, Alice Dinsdale. Following the death of his father, Pryme and his mother moved to Nottinghamshire, where he attended private schools until he returned to the East Riding of Yorkshire to attend Hull Grammar School in 1796.

In 1799, Pryme entered Trinity College, Cambridge, winning a scholarship there in 1800 and graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 1803. In 1804, he began studying law at Lincoln's Inn, and was called to the Bar in 1806, practising in London until health problems forced him to return to Cambridge in 1808.

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Thomas Perronet Thompson

Thomas Perronet Thompson (15 March 1783 – 6 September 1869, aged 86) was born in Kingston upon Hull. He was educated at Hull Grammar School. He graduated from Queens' College, Cambridge in 1802 with the rank of seventh Wrangler. He was a British Parliamentarian, a governor of Sierra Leone and a radical reformer.

He became prominent in 1830s and 1840s as a leading activist in the Anti-Corn Law League. He specialized in the grass-roots mobilisation of opinion through pamphlets, newspaper articles, correspondence, speeches, and endless local planning meetings.

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William Wilberforce

William Wilberforce was born in this house on 24 August 1759. He was the only son of Robert Wilberforce (1728–1768), a wealthy merchant, and his wife, Elizabeth Bird (1730–1798). In 1767 at the age of 7, he began attending Hull Grammar School, which in the following year was headed by Joseph Milner, who would become a lifelong friend.

Wilberforce profited from the supportive atmosphere at Hull Grammar School, until his father died in 1768. With his mother struggling to cope, the nine-year-old Wilberforce was sent to a prosperous uncle and aunt with houses in both St James's Place, London, and Wimbledon. He attended an "indifferent" boarding school in Putney for two years and spent his holidays in Wimbledon, where he grew extremely fond of his relatives. He became interested in evangelical Christianity due to his relatives' influence, especially that of his aunt Hannah, a philanthropist and a supporter of the leading Methodist preacher George Whitefield.

Wilberforce's staunchly Church of England mother and grandfather, alarmed at these nonconformist influences and at his leanings towards evangelicalism, brought the 12-year-old boy back to Hull in 1771. His family opposed a return to Hull Grammar School because the headmaster Joseph Milner had become a Methodist, and Wilberforce continued his education at Pocklington School from 1771 to 1776. Influenced by Methodist scruples, he initially resisted Hull's lively social life, but, as his religious fervour diminished, he embraced theatre-going, attended balls, and played cards.

In 1776 William went to Cambridge University and made friends with William Pitt a future Prime Minister. He gained a BA in 1781. Whilst still a student he became MP for Kingston upon Hull in 1780 and MP for Yorkshire in 1784.

In October 1784, Wilberforce embarked upon a tour of Europe with his mother, sister and Isaac Milner, the younger brother of his former headmaster. They visited the French Riviera and had dinners, played cards, and gambled. In February 1785, Wilberforce returned to London temporarily, to support Pitt's proposals for parliamentary reforms. He rejoined the party in Genoa, Italy, and they continued their tour to Switzerland. Isaac Milner accompanied William to England, and on the journey they read "The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul" by Philip Doddridge, a leading early 18th-century English nonconformist.

Wilberforce's spiritual journey is thought to have changed course at this time. He started to rise early to read the Bible and pray and kept a private journal.

He underwent an evangelical conversion, regretting his past life and resolving to commit his future life and work to the service of God.

He was a popular figure and was known to be charming and witty and a great public speaker. He campaigned for a number of causes: for legislation to improve the lives of the poor, education reform, prison reforms and ending child labour. He was also one of the founders of the Royal Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

Wilberforce left Hull in 1792 and moved to Clapham, London to be closer to his work in Westminster. Within the local community he found friends who shared his interests in religion and politics. They became known as the Clapham Sect and they actively supported the anti-slavery abolitionists. With the backing of his friend William Pitt, who became Prime Minister, Wilberforce became leader of The Society for the Abolition of Slavery.

The society campaigned for almost 20 years to bring an end to British involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Wilberforce married Barbara Spooner in 1797 and they had six children. Historical accounts show that he was a loving and devoted husband and father, and was proud that three of his sons became clergymen.

Wilberforce attempted several times to bring private members' bills before Parliament to end Britain's involvement in the slave trade, but the Bill was defeated many times. It was finally passed on 25 March, 1807. However, this only went as far as banning British people from engaging in the slave trade, it did not ban slavery itself. Wilberforce retired from politics in 1825 due to ill health, but he continued to campaign for the abolition of slavery.

Finally, on 26 July 1833, as Wilberforce lay on his deathbed, he was told that the Slavery Abolition Bill, granting freedom to all enslaved people within the British Empire, had been passed by Parliament. He died three days later.

As a mark of respect for his achievements, his body was buried in Westminster Abbey.