

L DFWW

William Wilberforce letters

1799-1832

Biographical Background: William Wilberforce was born in Hull on 24 August 1759, the only son of a Hull merchant whose wealth derived from the Baltic trade. The family had originally come from the village of Wilberfoss near York. William attended Hull Grammar School but his Hull schooldays were cut short by the death of his father and he was placed in the care of his uncle and aunt at Wimbleton. He later attended Pocklington Grammar School and St. John's College, Cambridge, where he met William Pitt, the future Prime Minister. William became interested in politics and was elected MP for Hull in 1780. Four years later he became MP for Yorkshire, a very influential position.

Wilberforce led the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade in Parliament, whilst the Abolition society collected evidence and organised petitions. Leaflets, songs and badges were distributed to rally public opinion. However, their opponents were also well organised and fought back with their own propaganda. The progress of abolition was halted by the outbreak of the French revolution and a slave rebellion in San Domingo, but in 1807 the Act to abolish the Slave trade was finally passed, a great victory for Wilberforce and his friends. They believed that slaves would now be treated more humanely as the supply of slaves dwindled, but the illegal slave trade flourished.

Five years later, Wilberforce resigned his Yorkshire seat in favour of a quieter constituency, preferring to spend more time with his family. During his final years in the Commons he was attacked for not helping the poor in Britain. In 1815 he supported the Corn Laws which raised the price of corn and three years later approved harsh laws following the Peterloo massacre.

Wilberforce died on 29 July 1833, believing the abolition of slavery to be within reach. On his deathbed he heard that the Bill to free all slaves in the British colonies had passed its second reading in the Commons.

Custodial history: Deposited with Hull Local Studies Library prior to its relocation to the Hull History Centre in 2010.

Description: Comprised of letters written by William Wilberforce but also Wilberforce related letters and their acquisition.

Extent: 1 box [29 items]

Related material: Material Papers of William Wilberforce can be found at C DFW. Additionally, books relating to slavery, emancipation, and Wilberforce together with his life are available in the library. Many of these can be borrowed using a Hull Libraries card (Ref L. SLA)

Access conditions: Access will be granted to any accredited reader

L DFWW/1

Letters from William Wilberforce
19 items

1799-1832

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| L DFWW/1/1 | <p>Letter to David Scott, Esq.
From William Wilberforce, Broomfield, Clapham Common to David Scott Esq. 23 Harley Street. William says he was unwell the previous day but hopes he will not be prevented from meeting Scott at India House tomorrow. The letter features a red seal with a bird embossed into the wax. A typescript transcript of the letter has been attached.
1 item</p> | 18 Jun 1799 |
| L DFWW/1/2 | <p>Letter from William Wilberforce to an unknown Gentleman
Saying that he had sent to Grants for result of yesterdays proceedings, the results of which pleased him. He also says that a headache prevented him from going out in the evening. A typescript transcript of the letter has been attached.
1 item</p> | 20 Jun 1799 |
| L DFWW/1/3 | <p>Letter to H. Bankes MP
Lengthy letter from William Wilberforce, Lyme to H. Bankes MP, Grimston, Nr Hull discussing foreign affairs including Napoleon Bonaparte and that he hoped to have the Abolition Bill ready for when Parliament meets in November but doubts he will be able to finish it in time. With extract from the Sale Catalogue relating to this item (see L DFWW/1/21). A typescript transcript of the letter has been attached.
3 items</p> | 25 Sep 1806 |
| L DFWW/1/4 | <p>Letter to William Hayley
From William Wilberforce, Nr London to William Hayley, Felpham, Chichester informing Hayley about the birth of William's son [Henry William Wilberforce] 'both Mother and infant appear at the present to be doing as well as possible'. The letter features a red seal with a bird embossed into the wax. With a typescript transcript of the letter.
1 item</p> | 22 Sep 1807 |
| L DFWW/1/5 | <p>Letter to Dr Clarke
From William Wilberforce, Herstmonceaux, Nr Battel to Dr Clarke referring to a cast of the face of Mr John Howard [the Prison Reformer] said to have been sent to William Wilberforce.
1 item</p> | 24 Oct 1810 |

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| L DFWW/1/6 | Letter to Ebenezer Maitland
From William Wilberforce, Yoxall Lodge, Nr Lichfield to Ebenezer Maitland enquiring if Maitland will accept Wilberforce's proxy vote regarding the election of children, William Dolling and Martha Blight are both named, to places in an orphan school.
1 item | 23 Nov 1811 |
| L DFWW/1/7 | Testimonials for Mr Lee
Four testimonials for Mr Williams who was applying for a post of Magistrate at Greenwich from R. Clark, Chamberlain's Office, Guildhall; J.P. Stratford, Chancery Office; James Stephen, Chancery Office and William Wilberforce regarding Mr William's conduct and character 'impressed me with a favourable opinion of his Talents, Integrity, Disposition and Manners'. The envelope features a seal with a bird embossed into the red wax. With a typescript transcript.
3 items | 23 Nov 1811 |
| L DFWW/1/8 | Letter to Revd Thomas Raffles
From William Wilberforce, Barley Wood, Nr Bristol to the Revd Thomas Raffles apologising for not replying to Raffles' letter sooner. He asks where he can obtain a copy of 'Mr Spencer's Life' if he cannot find a copy at any Common Bookseller's for example Hatchard's. With a typescript transcript of the letter.
1 item | 21 Oct 1813 |
| L DFWW/1/9 | Letter to Thomas Rowcroft
From William Wilberforce, Brighton to Thomas Rowcroft thanking him for the package he received from Mr Rowcroft. He mentions reading about the death of Mrs Rowcroft, the health of 'the poor little blacks' in their 'filthy and cruel occupation' and the Irish.
1 item | 4 Dec 1815 |
| L DFWW/1/10 | Letter to James Thomson, Esq
From William Wilberforce, Lowestoft, Suffolk to James Thomson Esq regarding the Duke of Kent's foundation and support for the Bencoolind Institution. Wilberforce says that he has 'come to a considerable distance out of town for my own health and that of my family' and that for this reason he has to decline Thomson's proposal.
1 item | 9 Sep 1816 |

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L DFWW/1/11	Letter to Revd Basil Wood From William Wilberforce, Lowestoft to Revd Basil Woodd apologising for not replying sooner and returns his interesting letter. A typescript transcript of the letter has been attached. (Previous Ref: W.W/001/9b) 2 items	16 Sep 1816
L DFWW/1/12	Label From William Wilberforce to Mrs Pike, The Revd Mr Batten's Harrow 1 item	19 Mar 1819
L DFWW/1/13	Letter to Messrs Cadell and Davies From William Wilberforce, Bath to Messrs Cadell and Davies requesting that a copy of his 'Practical View of Christianity etc' be sent to Earl Camden, Arlington Street and another copy to the Rt Hon George Canning, Board of Control Office in Cannon Row, Nr Westminster Bridge. He asks that 'the books to be neatly bound, gilt and Lettered' and hopes that Mr Canning receives his soon as he was going abroad shortly. With a typescript transcript of the letter. Also includes an extract from another letter bearing the signature of William Wilberforce. 3 items	1 Jan 1820
L DFWW/1/14	Letter to Ebenezer Maitland From William Wilberforce, Bath to Ebenezer Maitland apologising for not replying to Maitland's letter and invitation. With a typescript transcript of the letter. 1 item	10 May 1821
L DFWW/1/15	Letter to Henry Drummond, Esq. From William Wilberforce, Brompton Grove to Henry Drummond, Esq. requesting hospitality at Albany Park for himself and his family 'for a day or 2 or 3'. 1 item	8 Jun 1824

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- L DFWW/1/16 Letter to Zachary Macaulay 16 Apr 1825
From William Wilberforce, Uxbridge to Zachary Macaulay, Mansion House, London relating to a range of issues including the discussions mediated by Macaulay regarding setting prices for colonial produce. Wilberforce writes that his youngest grand-child has been 'dangerously ill' and that his son William has been very concerned. Wilberforce hopes that when his grand-child is better Macaulay will speak to William [Jnr] about the work of the Free Labour Tropical Produce Society.
- Wilberforce asks whether the Chancellor has made a decision on the subject of the various Companies. With reference to the Sierra Leone Affairs Wilberforce says they 'should have deferred our proceedings as soon as the war broke out'. He also says 'I am almost sorry for having retired when I find this subject likely to come before the House [of Commons]'. There is also a post note about the sad losses on the Gold Coast.
- A note has been added that this letter is 'Important for the early history of Sierra Leone'. With a typescript transcript of the letter.
2 items
- L DFWW/1/17 Letter to Rt Hon Lord Gooderich 25 Sep 1827
From William Wilberforce, Lea, Lincolnshire to Rt Hon Lord Gooderich Prime Minister; Captain Hagan, RN; Slave Trade; asking for help in obtaining an appointment for Hagan in the Water Guard of Ireland, gives brief details of Hagan's career in Africa. With a typescript transcript of the letter.
2 items
- L DFWW/1/18 Letter to John Mortlock 6 Sep 1832
From William Wilberforce, Goddstone to John Mortlock asking him to convey 'a religious work' to his daughter staying in Geneva. Features a seal with bird embossed in the black wax.
1 item
- L DFWW/1/19 Letter to Miss Ln n.d.
From William Wilberforce, Pulteney Street to Miss Ln [incomplete]
1 item

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L DFWW/1/20	Letter to Sir T.F. Buxton From William Wilberforce, Brompton Grove to Sir T.F. Buxton with a signed illustration of Buxton with two press illustrations of Wilberforce Column and Wilberforce House pasted on the reverse of the letter. 12 Mar. 2 items	n.d.
L DFWW/1/21	Acquisition of Wilberforce letters Correspondence concerning the purchase of a William Wilberforce letter (see DFWW/1/3) from Maggs Bros auctioneers for £3 3s (Sep 1934); correspondence with bookseller Ifan Kyrle Fletcher concerning the purchase of three Wilberforce letters (see DFWW/1/5; DFWW/1/14; and DFWW/1/17) for £3 3s (Sep 1956); list of autograph letters in the local collection and list (n.d.) of books, manuscripts and other items relating to William Wilberforce and the subject of slavery. (Previous Refs: W.W/002/02/01a - 03b) 6 items	1934-1956
L DFWW/2	Wilberforce related 6 items	1833-1906
L DFWW/2/1	Letter to Mr P. H. Page Letter from Sir James Stephen, Colonial Office, London requesting, as one of the Executor's to William Wilberforce's estate, if Mr Page could 'effect the sale of his House at Brampton'. He also requests the sum of £48 2s 1d that is owed to the Estate. With the Colonial Office seal in red wax. 1 item	30 Oct 1833
L DFWW/2/2	Letter to Sir Francis Freeling Letter to Sir Francis Freeling, Bart, Post Office General, London from Henry William Wilberforce, Oxford referring to an entry about the Wilberforce Prize Essay which Henry William Wilberforce claims has been changed by mistake. Attached are two newspaper cuttings an advert for 'Wilberforce's Prize Essay' and an obituary for Henry William Wilberforce. 1 item	18 Jun 1834
L DFWW/2/3	Letter to Sir Francis Freeling Letter to Sir Francis Freeling, Bart, Post Office General, London from Rev Isaac Wilberforce, East Farleigh requesting that a parcel sent to Henry William Wilberforce be sent to Isaac as Henry William Wilberforce is 'absent on the continent'. 1 item	22 Jun 1834

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L DFWW/2/4	Letter to Sir Francis Freeling Letter from Robert Wilberforce, Burton Agnes, Hull asking for somebody to value some books belonging to a friend 1 item	1 Dec 1853
L DFWW/2/5	Letter Letter from Edward Wilberforce [Grandson], Williamston, Insch, Aberdeenshire thanking him for a copy of the 'Eastern Morning News' with its account of the opening of Wilberforce House Museum [on 24 August 1906]. He had intended to attend but had been taken ill, but he hopes to visit in the future and contribute some 'relics' of his Grandfather's to the museum's collections. With a typescript transcript attached. 2 items	29 Aug 1906
L DFWW/2/6	Letter Transcript of a letter from W F Wilberforce, Roystone, Barnsley acknowledging receipt of a "curious" document [22 Nov ?] Transcript of a letter from W F Wilberforce, Roystone, Barnsley confirming he has shown the "curious" document to the Bishop of Oxford, is thought to relate to time when Wilberforce was Mayor of Hull [c.1745] [24 Mar ?] 1 item/4 pages	n.d.
L DFWW/3	Portraits 2 items	1836-1838
L DFWW/3/1	Portrait of William Wilberforce Portrait of William Wilberforce sitting at a desk with a quill and book on the desk to the left of the print. Painted by G. Richmond and engraved by J. Jenkins, London and Printed by Fisher, Son & Co. With William Wilberforce's signature reproduced beneath it. 1 item	1836
L DFWW/3/2	William Wilberforce Portrait of William Wilberforce Aet 69 based from an unfinished original by Sir Thomas Lawrence. Published by John Murray. With a short biographical entry of William Wilberforce designed to accompany the print. 2 items	1838