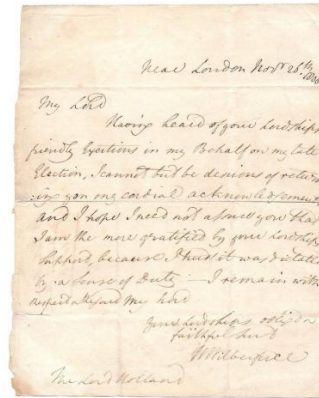




William Wilberforce believed that the slave trade was evil and had to be abolished. For seventeen years he tried, and failed, to convince Parliament to outlaw the practice.

Near the beginning of his quest, Wilberforce wanted to talk about his ideas with John Newton, a former slaver who penned the still-famous song, "[Amazing Grace](#)."

Wilberforce's diary, of 1785, reveals that he struggled with the thought of talking with John Newton:

30 November I thought seriously this evening of going to converse with Mr Newton.

2 December Resolved again about Mr Newton. It may do good; he will pray for me. Kept debating in that unsettled way...

On the 2nd of December, Wilberforce delivered a letter to Newton:

Sir, there is no need of apology for intruding on you, when the errand is religion. I wish to have some serious conversation with you, and will take the liberty of calling on you for that purpose, in half an hour; when, if you cannot receive me, you will have the goodness to let me have a letter put into my hands at the door, naming a time and place for our meeting, the earlier the more agreeable to me.

I have had ten thousand doubts within myself, whether or not I should discover myself to you; but every argument against doing it has its foundation in pride. I am sure you will hold yourself bound to let no one living know of this application, or of my visit, till I release you for the obligation.

What followed thereafter (if anything), plus the signature, has been torn away.

Then there is a postscript:

P.S. Remember that I must be secret, and that the gallery of the House is now so universally attended, that the face of a member of Parliament is pretty well known.

William's diary, for the 3rd of December, reveals further personal thoughts about meeting with Newton:

3 December Had a good deal of debate with myself about seeing Newton.

He did see John Newton, although Wilberforce continued to argue with himself before knocking on the church door:

After walking about the Square once or twice before I could persuade myself, I called upon old Newton.

Following the meeting, a calmer Wilberforce wrote in his diary:

When I came away I found my mind in a calm, tranquil state, more humbled, and looking more devoutly up to God.

He was ready to begin a journey—to convince Parliament to abolish the slave trade—which would ultimately take two decades.

The letter, depicted in this image, was also written by Wilberforce. He penned it in 1806, the year before Parliament abolished the slave trade (on February 23, 1807) at 4 o'clock in the morning.

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Image online, courtesy EBay.

PD

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Media Stream



William Wilberforce Portrait

Image online, courtesy the [National Portrait Gallery](#).

PD

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