

John Sharp DD, vicar of Hartburn 1749 – 1792: his sermon in support of abolition

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Introduction

John Sharp (1723 – 1792) was vicar at St Andrew's Hartburn between 1749 and his death at the age of 69. He and his brothers were significant in the Enlightenment: famous for church, philanthropy, abolition, music, medicine, industry and good works¹. This note is about John and his younger brother Granville (1735 – 1813). Granville is known as the 'father' of abolition and John was actively involved in raising money for that cause in support of his brother's activities: through his preaching in Northumberland and using his contacts in Durham Cathedral.

Granville's summary of his brother John's character was that he: *"stands distinguished in the records of British humanity at Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland, - a place where many circumstances have contributed to produce a charitable asylum unparalleled in our (or, probably, in any other) island"*² It is for his activities at Bamburgh that John is now principally remembered, but this was only part of his work.

Dr Sharp's stock of sermons is preserved in the library at Durham Cathedral and sermon 3 contains his preaching against the slave trade. This note presents the context of that sermon and its delivery throughout Northumberland and elsewhere.

John Sharp

John's grandfather, also John (1645 – 1714), had been Archbishop of York and an influential figure in the restoration of the monarchy after the Civil War. This made the Sharps "ecclesiastical royalty"³, which in practical terms meant they had hereditary rights to prebendary positions (at Durham and elsewhere), which came along with a stipend and a house – in the Sharp's case including one of the substantial houses in the Close next to the Cathedral in Durham. This favour reflected the fact that a gentleman that had dedicated his life and work to the Church had little opportunity to develop estates and wealth for himself and his descendants were, therefore, disadvantaged in terms of inheritance.

John's father, Thomas (1693 – 1758), was Archdeacon of Northumberland, Prebendary Canon at Durham and vicar of Rothbury, and the Sharp children were brought up between the houses in Rothbury and Durham. John would later inherit the prebendary position, as eldest son, and succeeded his father as Archdeacon.

The family could only afford a university education for the two eldest children, John and Thomas (1725 – 1772), who both entered the church. The other four surviving male siblings (Charles, William, James and Granville) were apprenticed, and the three sisters (Elizabeth, Judith and Frances) were educated, in the manner of the time, to look after their parents, siblings and future families. John studied at Trinity Cambridge and was awarded his BA in 1743/4 and MA in 1747. He was ordained Deacon at Ely one year later in 1748 and confirmed as priest one year later again in 1749. His

¹ Hester Grant (2020), *The Good Sharps*, Penguin Random House UK

² Prince Hoare (1820), *Memoirs of Granville Sharp Esq.*, Henry Colburn and Co., London, p.16, available for free download from www.archive.org

³ Using the words of Canon Michael Everitt at Durham who kindly educated me in these matters.

doctorate was awarded ten years later in 1759. John's father helped to install him in the lucrative living at Hartburn (worth about £85,000 per annum in current value) after his confirmation as priest in 1749, and he served the Parish for 43 years.

He married Mary Dering in Ripon Cathedral on 4th December 1752 and they had one child: Anne Jemma born in 1762. Ann Jemima had no offspring and the family branch died out with her.

On the death of his father, when he was 35, John inherited the position of Prebendary Canon at Durham Cathedral and the Trusteeship of Lord Crewe's Charity, which brought with it responsibility for Bamburgh Castle. He was further appointed to the Perpetual Curacy of Bamburgh on the early death of his brother Thomas at 47 years old, in 1773. John was aged 50 when he took on this position, which was to seal his reputation in Northumberland for posterity. It was in this role that he developed his proto-welfare state at Bamburgh Castle, and where he commissioned the world's first lifeboat, subsequently made famous by Grace Darling.



John Sharp and his wife Mary (left), as they appear in a family portrait by Johan Zoffany painted in 1779 when John was 56 years old, and Granville Sharp (right) aged about 44 from the same painting (by kind permission of the National Gallery and the Lloyd-Baker Estate).

The Sharp Sermons

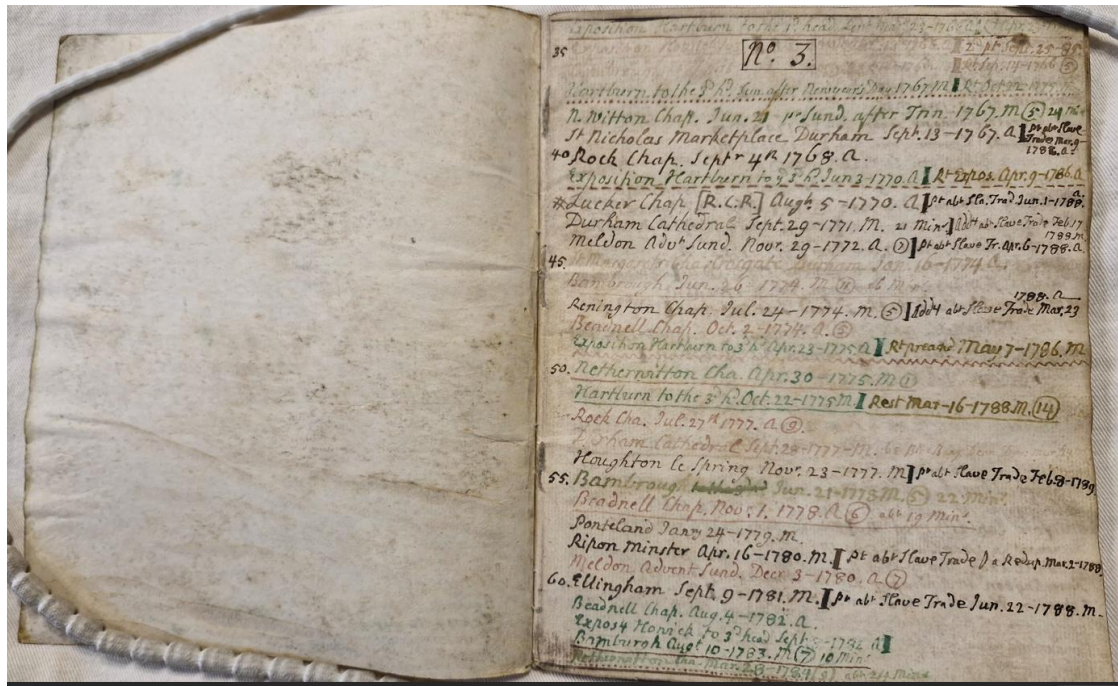
John's sermons are contained in two boxes in Durham Cathedral Library. The earliest were written when he was a student, with sermon 2⁴ delivered in 1748, the year after he graduated from Trinity. Sermon 48, the last, was first delivered in 1763, 11 years after he arrived in Hartburn. He developed his stock of sermons early in his career, primarily leading up to his doctorate in 1759⁵, and, once they were established, he cycled them, mostly with only minor alterations. He kept detailed notes about where and when he gave each sermon, and in some cases how long the delivery took. There is an

⁴ There is no Sermon number 1 in the record – it hasn't survived. Is that because it was his first as a student and he subsequently thought it to be not up to standard, or is it just lost?

⁵ My guess is that the meticulous stock of sermons and records were submitted as part of his doctorate training.

additional number in a circle against some entries in his log, which I speculate could be the size of the plate in shillings – but that is just a guess. If this is correct, a typical plate in 1750 was about £60 in current money (6 shillings in 1750).

Sermon number 3 is on the text “who is my neighbour”, which was much extended in 1787 to preach in the cause of the abolition of the slave trade.



A page from Sermon 3 showing part of John Sharp’s record of delivery. Reference to the preaching of the abolition modification can be seen in the black notes appended to earlier deliveries at the same church – he had preached the sermon so many times that he ran out of space to add new records (by kind permission of The Lord Crewe Trust and Durham Cathedral Library).

The Sharps and abolition

The origin of the family's activity in the abolition movement possibly started with Granville's apprenticeship to a Quaker Linen Draper at Great Tower Hill in London in 1750. In 1754 the Quakers became the first group to free their slaves in North America and Quakerism was strongly influential in British abolition. Granville became personally involved in the evils of slavery in 1765, when he met Jonathan Strong. The following account is taken directly from Granville's memoir² where his and Jonathan Strong's words (in italicised quotes) can be read along with abstracts from court papers. It is well worth the effort to read these. The un-varnished accounts of the cruelties and injustice to which Granville was reacting are laid bare and direct quotes relating to the activities of slavers make arresting reading.

Jonathan Strong had been beaten close to death with a pistol by his "owner", who then turned him out into the streets of London to die. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography records that Jonathan was born in Barbados in about 1747, which would make him around 18 at the time of this incident. He was brought to England by his "owner" David Lisle, a lawyer, following Lisle's unsuccessful attempts at business in Barbados. Records show that Strong was baptised in St Leonard's, Shoreditch, on 22nd July 1765, which may have been the cause of his punishment by Lisle. Many slaves erroneously thought they would be immediately eligible for freedom if they became baptised. He was nearly blind and could barely walk and he had been directed to the free surgeries held every morning at William Sharp's⁶ surgery in Mincing Lane. Granville was very close to his older brother William and lived in his household. He encountered Jonathan Strong on the doorstep trying to gain access to the Clinic. William, who was assistant surgeon at St Bartholomew's hospital, admitted him for a stay of 4½ months, at the Sharp family's expense⁷, where his health became sufficiently restored for him to be placed in the service of a '*respectable apothecary*', Mr Brown, in Fenchurch Street.

Jonathan had been in the Brown's service for two years when his former "owner", David Lisle, spied him in attendance on his master's wife's coach and had him followed covertly to find out where he lived – perceiving that as he was clearly working that his 'value' had been restored. He then hatched a plot that involved tricking Jonathan to attending a potential client at a pub, where he was kidnapped and imprisoned. Jonathan managed to get a message to Mr. Brown, who, after visiting the prison, withdrew having been intimidated by Lisle who accused him threateningly of "*detaining his property*". Jonathan then managed to get a letter to Granville, who initially could not remember who Jonathan Strong was. He sent a servant (Poole) to the prison (the "Poultry Compter" in the City⁸) to enquire, but the warders twice denied any knowledge of anyone called Strong. This aroused Granville's suspicion, and he visited for himself and gained access to the prisoner. He subsequently gained his release from imprisonment by petitioning to the Lord Mayor that, as there was no warrant for his arrest, he had been detained illegally.

On September 18th, Granville attended the Lord Mayor at the Mansion house, where David Lisle tried to reclaim what he regarded as his property: "*having sold him to James Kerr, Esq., a Jamaica planter, who had refused to pay the purchase money (thirty pounds) until the Negro should be delivered on*

⁶ William was a highly successful surgeon in the City of London, counting George III amongst his clients.

⁷ It is clear from the memoir that William and Granville both attended to Jonathan, but it appears that their brother James was also involved in the expense and subsequently in the lawsuit. All three of the brothers lived in the City of London: 300 miles from their older brother John in Northumberland.

⁸ A small prison located on Poultry, for the housing of minor offenders in relation to civil law.

board a ship belonging to Messrs. Muir and Atkinson, bound to Jamaica, the captain of which vessel, Mr. David Lair, was the other person then attending, to take him away”.

At the hearing, Kerr produced a bill of sale from Lisle, although he had not yet paid him, in support of his claim to property. Granville’s memoir prints the wording of the bill in full, because it is a document of a type (i.e. relating to a slave) that would not ordinarily have been seen in England. It makes for disturbing reading. It appears hurriedly written with the aim of conclusion of the deal as fast as possible, to get Strong away on a waiting ship to Jamaica. As a lawyer, David Lisle was probably sure of his ground in writing this, but it reads as the work of an angry man and as a document designed to intimidate. The use of the terms “to have and to hold”, more usually encountered in the marriage service, make the words particularly chilling:

“Bill &c.&c. To all whom these presents shall come, David Lisle, of the parish of St. James, &c.&c. greeting. Know ye that the said David Lisle, for and in consideration of the sum of thirty pounds good and lawful money, &c. to him in hand truly paid by James Kerr, Esq., late of Jamaica, &c.&c. doth grant, bargain, sell and confirm unto the said James Kerr, his heirs and assigns, one Negro Man Slave, named Jonathan Strong, now in the possession of the said David Lisle, and the reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders, rents, profits, and services of the said slave, and all the estate, right, title, interest, property, claim and demand whatsoever, of him the said David Lisle, of, in, and to the same, To have and to hold the said Negro man, Jonathan Strong, unto the said James Kerr, his heirs, &c. to the only proper and absolute use and behoof of the said J. Kerr, his heirs and assigns, &c. for ever &c. Signed DAVID LISLE. (Here follows a receipt from David Lisle for the thirty pounds paid by James Kerr)”

The conclusion to this hearing is best appreciated in the words directly from Granville’s memoir:

" The Lord Mayor having heard the claim, said, that ‘the lad had not stolen anything⁹, and was not guilty of any offence, and was therefore at liberty to go away;’ whereupon the captain seized him by the arm, and told the Lord Mayor, ‘he took him as the property of Mr. Kerr.’ Mr. Beech, the city coroner, now came behind G. S., and whispered in his ear the words ‘Charge him ;’ at which G. S. turned upon the captain, and in an angry manner said, ‘Sir, I charge you for an assault,’. On this. Captain Lair quitted his hold of Jonathan’s arm, and all bowed to the Lord Mayor and came away, Jonathan following G. S., and no one daring to touch him.

A few days after this transaction, G. S. was charged, by a writ, with having robbed the original master, David Lisle, the lawyer, of a Negro slave, and also of another slave, &c. &c."

The memoir states that the writ was served on both Granville and James, so it appears that he had solicited his brother’s help in achieving Jonathan Sharp’s freedom. James was a respected Iron Monger in the City, with extensive “*manufacturies*”, so his influence in the City court would likely have been significant.

The memoir records that David Lisle subsequently visited Granville and demanded “*gentlemanlike satisfaction*” or, in other words, challenged Granville to a duel. Granville responded that “*as he [Lisle]*

⁹ Although Lisle countered this by accusing Strong of stealing the livery he had been dressed in when he was turned out of Lisle’s house for dead.

had studied the law so many years, he should want no satisfaction that the law could give him." Granville was as good as his word and pursued the cause from that point with astonishing energy¹⁰. Granville managed to string out the case whilst he prepared and, eventually, Lisle offered to settle but Granville refused. He eventually sought to counter-sue all parties, including: the buyer and seller of the slave, the two City officers that had apprehended Sharp in the first place, the Notary who had witnessed Lisle's bill of sale and the master of the ship that tried to take possession to transport him to Jamaica. The trial never concluded. Jonathan Strong died on 19th April 1773, aged about 27, and this led Lisle to withdraw all claims, at which point he was charged with "*triple costs*".

This incident started Granville on the road to a ruling that settled confusion from previous judgements, as to whether slaves immediately obtained their freedom by setting foot on British soil. Granville got involved in other cases in support of slaves and their freedom on British soil, responding to pleas from men, normally kidnapped, being transported back to the West Indies. This including one case where the slave in question was rescued from a ship that had already departed for the West Indies, but which had been detained at anchor in The Downs because of adverse winds.

He published argument and opinion on the matter, but it remained ambiguous in law and Lord Chief Justice Mansfield remained on the fence. Granville had the bit between his teeth and, despite starting with no legal training whatsoever, began a fight to end the shame and iniquity that was slavery under British control. In 1769 he published an influential tract and his efforts culminated in 1772 when he was instrumental in securing Lord Mansfield's ruling in *Somerset v Stewart*, which held that the condition of slavery in England was not consistent with the law of Habeas Corpus.

James Somerset had been brought to England by his "owner", Mr Charles Stewart, in 1769. He tried to find freedom but in 1772 Stewart had him kidnapped and put aboard the *Ann and Mary*, to be taken back to Jamaica and sold. This became a test case to settle the confusion from previous rulings. Granville paid for the case to be heard before Mr Chief Justice Mansfield. The eloquence of the words of Serjeant Davey who led James Somerset's defence, make riveting reading. For example, it was proposed by the prosecution that the rights of the 'owner' under the laws of Virginia should be respected in England. The implication of this is that other countries' laws can apply here in England. Serjeant Davy's argument was decisive:

"Either this man remains, upon his arrival in England, in the condition he was in abroad, in Virginia, or not. If he does so remain, the master's power remains as before. If the laws, having attached upon him abroad, are at all to affect him here, it brings them all: either all the laws of Virginia are to attach upon him here, or none,— for where will they draw the line.?"

"Have the laws of Virginia any more influence, power, or authority in this country, than the laws of Japan?"

"Now, suppose a Christian slave brought from Turkey here—or suppose a bashaw¹¹ come into this country with half a score Circassian women slaves for his amusement—suppose they should, in this case, think proper to say to this bashaw, ' Sir, we will no longer be the subjects of your

¹⁰ Starting with teaching himself to be a lawyer! In his own words, up to that time he "*had never once opened a law book to consult it, till on occasion of the present cause.*" Legal opinion at the time told him that he was unlikely to overrule 1729 rulings by Chief Justices York and Talbot that overturned a previous ruling by Chief Justice Holt in the reign of Queen Anne, who had ruled that slavery was not a status that could be applied on British soil. Such advice would have deterred most men from proceeding – but not Granville, who embarked on self-defence.

¹¹ OED: "The earlier form of the Turkish title pasha".

lust;—I believe he would make but a miserable figure at the bar of the Old Bailey, on an indictment for a rape."

On 22nd June 1772, Lord Mansfield ruled in favour of Somerset and the principle was established that *"as soon as any slave sets his foot on English ground he becomes free"* – Serjeant Davey's words.

Granville won a significant victory, but the shame that was the slavery in the New World continued and his attention now moved to the infamous "triangular trade". His work included getting involved in the Zong case, one of the most heinous crimes ever perpetrated. On March 19th 1783, "a negro", Gustavus Vasa, called on Granville with an account of 130 slaves *"being thrown alive into the sea from on board an English slave ship"* – Granville's own words from his memoir. In 1781 the master of the Zong, Luke Collingwood, made an error in navigation in trying to find Jamaica, which he mistook for Hispaniola and some of his cargo "began to spoil". The murder of the 130 slaves was a fraudulent insurance claim, Collingwood claiming that it was necessary to *"jettison cargo"* because of water shortage on board, which was threatening the lives of all. It was a fraudulent claim, the 'cargo' being murdered by Collingwood. It is sobering to note that the legal action in relation to this massacre centred on liability in relation to the insurance claim – not a criminal trial for murder.

Granville's activities culminated *"In 1787, along with his friend Thomas Clarkson and a few men of eminent character, all of whom were friendly to the cause, Granville established the Society for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade"*. The Society Solicited William Wilberforce to take the lead in Parliament and the trade was abolished in 1807. In October 1787 the Society adopted its iconic seal (designed by Wedgwood) *"which represents an African in chains, kneeling on one knee, and lifting both his hands in an act of supplication, with this motto, - "Am I not a man and a brother?"*.

What has all this to do with us in Hartburn? John Sharp, our vicar and Granville's oldest brother, is listed specifically in Granville's memoir as effecting support for the cause. What that meant in practical terms is that John Sharp developed a highly effective sermon to gain support for the cause. He preached this cause in Northumberland and elsewhere in 1787/88. He may also have had some influence in Cambridge University, which became a major donor to the cause.

Sermon number 3 – Who is my neighbour? – modified to preach against slavery

The original Sermon was first given at St Edwards College on Feb 5th, 1748, and it was probably written when John was a masters student at Cambridge. He gave it 4 times more in Cambridge that year, including *"Before the University Feb:26 – 1748/9"*. Then 4 times in London in 1749 (Southwell, St George's Hanover Square, St Swithin's London-stone, St Mary's Islington), then at Netherwitton on June 9th, 1751, the first instance following his installation at Hartburn¹². He preached this Sermon 100 times, the last instances being at Bamburgh Castle on Oct 30th, 1791, and finally at Durham prebendary House on Mar 18, 1792, just before his death. It was also preached after his death in Bamburgh, on 12th August 1824.

The text is *"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"* and the original sermon is a straightforward instruction on how we should behave towards God, ourselves and our neighbours. The record of where and when Sermon 3 was preached is much annotated with references to the slave trade, which is added to many of the entries as can be seen in the photograph above on page3. These

¹² Netherwitton was a chapel of ease linked to Hartburn at that time.

amendments relate to preaching of a modified version of the sermon in 1787/88, in his own parishes as well as wider destinations under his jurisdiction as Archdeacon and prebend, and further afield¹³.

Dr Sharp appears to have been very motivated by the subject. The entries in the log are not typical – they are appended to previous entries for the parishes concerned, rather than being fresh entries: he had run out of room in the book to record them. The handwriting is also much more hurried than the orderly records that are the norm in recording his preaching.

The amendments start by reinforcing the Bible's teaching on being kind. The sermon then goes on to address slavery directly and it can be read in full below. The first paragraph includes the emphasized phrase "*as said before*" and the final paragraph draws to a clear conclusion, so it appears that these words were given as a modified ending to the original sermon. It has references to patriarchy and colonialisation that are very slightly uncomfortable in the modern context, but which would have been the norm in 1788. It might also be said that Dr Sharp treads carefully at times: this was a highly controversial and political endeavour, which required sensitive and diplomatic delivery. It includes reference also to Doctor Sharp's vision for a health service and a welfare state, which he established at least locally in Bamburgh Castle, the surgery following the example of, and assisted by, his brother William, the surgeon who treated Jonathan Strong. His apparent attitude to ecumenism and wider cooperation between faiths may also be noted in his words.

John Sharp's words in full:

- *"If then, as said before, all mankind are to be considered as our brethren; how is it to be reconciled either to reason or scripture, that a part of our fellow creatures, should be as it were set at nought, & treated as if they were of a different class of beings from ourselves, nay vilified and degraded to the rank & nature of Brute Beasts; and yet they are Beings created in the image of God as well as ourselves, with whom we must all stand up before the judgement seat of Christ.*
- *It has been urged in favour of the Inhuman Traffick in Human Flesh, That the buying and selling of slaves was permitted in scripture, or at least not absolutely forbid. Let us consider this under 3 different periods of time, namely; the patriarchal age, the law and the Gospel; but on this I must be very short. One of the first instructions after the flood was the prohibition of murder, namely at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man¹⁴. Secondly, under the Law or Jewish Dispensation, bond service was indeed permitted but under great restrictions. Thy bondsmen shall be of the Heathen; of them shall ye buy bondsmen. The Hebrew slaves were only to serve for six years, & in the 7th to be let go free & even then not to go away empty. There was indeed in one case only, a provisional permission of perpetual servitude, but that could only be voluntary at the Request of the Person himself.*
- *But under the Gospel things were very different. There is not one passage in the New Testament in favour of slavery, but many against it. Those however who were in slavery were equally called to Christianity but if they could be made free to use it rather and it is remarkable that in the Epistle to Timothy where is an enumeration of the various & enormous crimes for which the law was made, that menstealers are particularly mentioned – now how the importers of slaves in these our times can altogether clear*

¹³ It was preached in Hartburn on March 16th 1788.

¹⁴ At this point the following sentence is crossed out: now it is worthy of notice that from that time to the giving of the law at mount Sinai, there is no mention of slaves or bondsmen, among the people of God, being bought or sold for money.

themselves from the imputation of this crime is somewhat difficult to say; and the Buyers and Receivers of what has been thus stolen sure cannot be entirely innocent – but should it be alleged that such traffick is tolerated by law and therefore not liable to be thus censured; I answer in the words of a very humane writer, that “no legislature can alter the nature of things or make that to be lawful which is contrary to the law of God”

- *But this species of commerce, bad as it is, is still further aggravated by the subsequent inhuman treatment of the miserable creatures, by which their lives are so shortened, that very large yearly supplies are necessary to keep up the number. – But perhaps the worst usage of all is their being kept ignorant of their God, and debarred of all the comforts of Christianity – Indeed in the Roman Catholick Colonies, the slaves are instructed and baptised; but in the colonies where the Reformed Religion is professed, no care at all seems to be taken of the souls of so many thousands of poor creatures annually torn away from their native countries, nor in general is anything good taught them. They are kept in subjection by fear & most severe punishment; - and if so, when they have an opportunity of rebelling, is it any wonder that ill treated and uninstructed as they are they should endeavour to retaliate on their Tyrannical Masters.*
- *I am far from saying that this is the universal practise of our colonies, nay it is to be hoped that there are many instances to the contrary; and I believe it has generally been found by experience, that those masters who have treated their slaves with the most lenity and mildness, have been the best repaid by their labour. – But those on the other hand who are unwilling to admit their slaves to the privileges of the Gospel, and as a writer observes, “not only neglect but object to the conversion of their slaves, upon pleas, which if originally admitted would have annihilated Christianity at its first appearance” and moreover who wantonly exercise their cruelty upon them for such things are perhaps (all things considered) in a much worse condition themselves than the poor creatures whom they so unreasonably torment and with whom they must finally stand up before the judgement seat of Christ.*
- *I have not time now to enter fully into further particulars nor can I charge myself with any wilful violation of the Truth. Of the Cruelties you may have incontestable proof from the Tracts that are now circulating in some of which it is also shewn that there can be no real necessity for any future importation of the human species as slaves; and that those who are already in our colonies, by being allowed to work out their liberty in a course of years, & consequently being instructed & civilized; by a milder treatment will without doubt increase in numbers; labour will be better carried on, and thousands of lives be annually saved.*
- *Those among you, My Brethren, who are in the inferior stations of life, are nevertheless Free, you receive the profits of your labour; if oppressed have your remedy at law; and while you are gaining an honest livelihood here, are at the same time laying up wages in Heaven, a treasure that will never fail; if disabled by accident you have a chance of being received into Hospitals where every kind of medical assistance is administered; or if infirm and unable to work for yourselves, are maintained by the Community you live in. – Such are the Blessings of Liberty for which You ought to be truly thankful and to make the best use of them you can. – Think then of the Dreadful Reverse of all this. That there should be many thousands of men, women & children now living who are purposely kept ignorant of their Duty, deprived of means of instruction, Heathens in a Christian country, & even ignorant of the God that made them, or at least of the Saviour that redeemed them; who half starved and unreasonably worked, have no laws to protect them or redress their Grievances; & no pitying hand stretched forth to help them in time of their greatest*

distress; but through no fault of their own, groan under the most cruel Bondage in some respects even worse than that of our Cattle of Burden, without hope of any relief or end of their suffering but by Death.

- *The affair is now in a train of being impartially discussed by the Great Legislature of the Nation. It is Our Duty in the mean time to pray to God from whom all good Counsels & all just works do proceed, to prosper this present work, (if we be in the right); and to cause the fruits of it yearly to increase, for the propagation of the Christian Religion amongst millions of poor Negroes, who have souls to be saved as well as we; whereby they may be reclaimed from their Darkness and Barbarity and taught what is infinitely preferable to all other kind of knowledge, To know their Creator and Redeemer.*
- *No difference of sect or profession should obstruct a charity like this; There is no room for prejudice in Benevolence; for though the very best persons of different communions or political principles may be greatly divided in some particulars, yet the Duty of Doing Good to our fellow creatures in Distress is one of the Essentials of Christianity in which we are all agreed.*
- *May God grant that Truth and Christianity may be further & further propagated to the most distant climes; until that Glorious Time shall come, where He shall have given every nation their call, and shall have gathered together His elect from the 4 corners of the Earth; when He shall have taken away all distinctions of sects amongst Christians, and of Jew, Gentile, Mahometan and Barbarian. When he shall have collected the Good of every kind into one fold, and of his infinite mercy, shall hasten his kingdom.*
- *Then shall a great multitude which no man can number of all nations and kindreds & people and tongues fall down before his Throne and worship God, saying, amen; Blessing & Glory & Wisdom & Thanksgiving & Honour & Power and Might be unto our God for ever and ever, amen.*

The delivery of the sermon

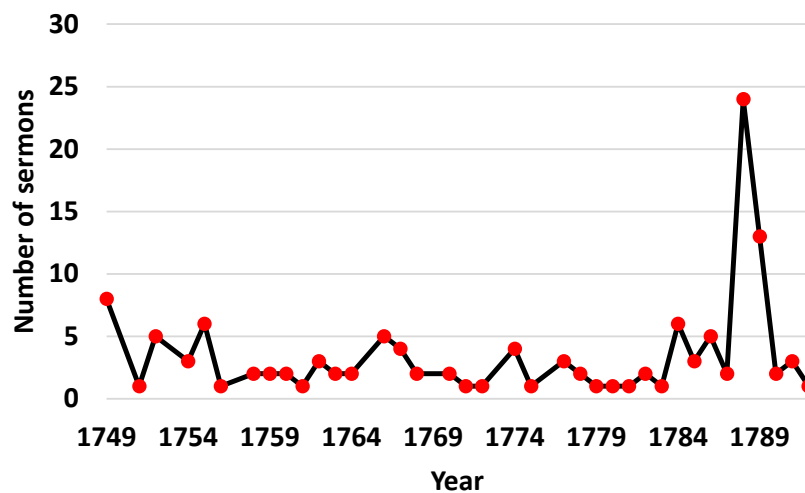
The main bulk of the anti-slavery sermon is referred to as “add 4” – i.e. either addition 4 or addendum 4. The words are highly political, addressing in a logical manner the arguments against the abolition of slavery and in support of abolition activity proceeding through parliament at the time. Some of this will be to counter the tracts on “*scriptural researches on the licitness of the slave trade*”¹⁵, which were developed by the pro-slavery lobby.

Between 1749 when he first delivered sermon number 3 to the academic body in Cambridge up to 1787 he delivered it on average 2.5 times per year. In 1787 and 1788 he gave the sermon with the new addition on the Slave Trade 37 times: 24 times in 1787 and 13 times in 1788. The first record is on February 8th 1787 in Houghton le Spring followed on February 17th at Durham Cathedral. Houghton is significant because the incumbent, Rev. John Rotheram MA, was a fellow trustee of the Lord Crewe Charity and was a close friend of John Sharp¹⁶. Perhaps because it was controversial he

¹⁵ Granville’s memoir, page 213.

¹⁶ The register of vicars at Houghton gives the following entry: “John Rotheram, MA – Rector for 20 years, he was liked by people of all denominations; he was buried in the Chancel of St Michael’s following his death at Bamburgh Castle on July 16th 1789, at the age of 64 years. His grave is next to that of his brother in the south transept of St Michael’s Church; their grave is marked by a marble tablet with a Latin inscription.” http://www.houghtonlespring.org.uk/parish_church/houghton_rectors.htm, accessed 9th February 2025. In 1766, John Rotheram had authored a book *An Essay on Faith and its Connection with Good Works*, linking him

wanted roll it to the Bishop, Dean and Chapter before preaching in the wider area, although his preaching at Durham may also have been part of his fund raising for the cause. He was clearly on a mission to evangelise the message over those two years. After 1788, however, the addition was removed from some of his preaching, reverting to the original sermon, but the last record where he preached to prebendary “9th Stall” at Durham Cathedral, on March 18th 1792, shortly before his death, addition 4 was included. The sermon, including addition 4, was preached in St Nicholas’ Newcastle, now Newcastle Cathedral, on July 19, 1789. This is likely to have been highly political, given the importance of that church in what was a highly mercantile town.



Number of times Sermon number 3 was delivered by year

He didn’t just preach addition 4 within his home diocese. The regions included were:

Area	Number of records of preaching sermon 3 with addition 4 on abolition
Cambridge	1
Durham	6
London	2
Northumberland	19
Scotland	1
Yorkshire	4

Table 1: Regions where John Sharp preached his addendum 4

In Northumberland he preached the message in the following places:

with John Sharp in elements of theology and philanthropy: https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_an-essay-on-faith-and-i_rotheram-john_1772/page/n1/mode/2up, accessed 10th February 2025.

Place	Number of records of preaching sermon 3 with addition 4 on abolition
Bamburgh	3
Beadnell	1
Bolam	1
Chatton	1
Ellingham	1
Embleton	1
Hartburn	1
Hexham	1
Meldon	1
Milton	1
Mitford	1
Netherwitton	2
Newcastle	1
Renington	1
Rothbury	1
Tweedmouth	1

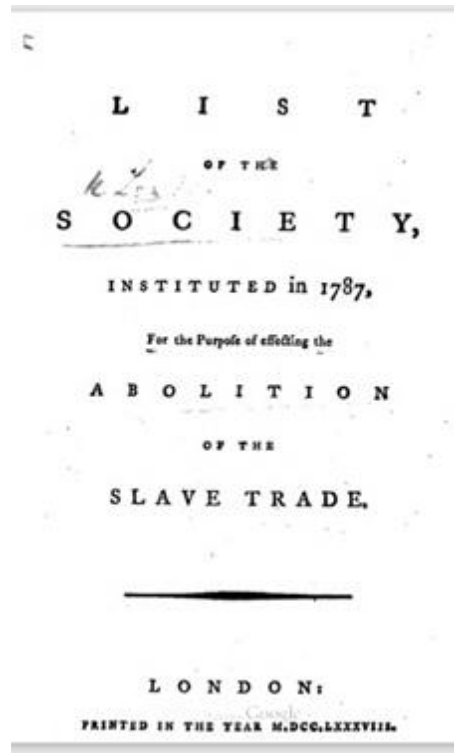
Table 2 – Churches where addendum 4 was preached within John Sharps jurisdiction as Archdeacon

The link between Sermon 3 and Granville’s abolition Society

The first record of discussion of abolition between Granville and John is a letter published in Granville’s memoir, dated March 1779, 8 years before the sermon was first given. The letter outlines Granville’s approaches to Bishops and Archbishops to solicit support for abolition of the slave trade and, in it, he lists those that were most motivated by the cause: *“The Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishops of Litchfield, St David’s. St Asaph, London, Ely, Bangor and Oxford, strongly express their horror against it; and the Bishop of Peterborough, since I called on him, has exerted himself in a very extraordinary manner, in calling on a variety of people that have knowledge of the trade, and reading all books that he can find upon the subject, in order that he may be enabled to answer the pleas of interested people who endeavour to promote the trade”*. We can surmise that Granville called on the support of his brother also who, although not being a Bishop or Archbishop, was very well connected in the North and in Cambridge, to similarly summon up enthusiasm in the cause.

The Society for the purpose of effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was instituted in 1787 by Granville Sharp. Granville was Chairman, with Samuel Hoare, a banker of Leadenhall Street, its treasurer. The Society published detailed accounts on 12th August 1788, by which time they had raised £2,760/2s/7d – equivalent in Dec 2024, according to the Bank of England inflation calculator¹⁷, to £357,851. Perhaps the most famous member of the committee listed, at least from the current perspective, was *“Josiah Wedgwood (of Greek Street, Soho, or Etruria, Staffordshire)”*.

¹⁷ <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>, accessed 9th February 2025



The title page from the Society's list of subscribers published in 1788¹⁸

About half of the donations were raised centrally through the Association in London, but sub-committees were formed in geographical regions, which raised the other half. The sub-committees were:

	£	S	D	2024 Equivalent Total £
Manchester	400	11	6	51,935
Bristol	146	4		18,955
Sheffield	134	0		17,373
York	123	10		16,012
Birmingham	113	8		14,702
Exeter	86	4	6	11,179
Leeds	62	9	6	8,100
Leicester	59	2		7,662
Rotherham	54	1	6	7,011
Total collected by sub-committees				152,929

Table 3: Total amounts collected by sub-committees listed in the 1788 account

¹⁸ Sourced from Google Books, 7th February 2025

The most common donation was 1 guinea or £1/1s - £136 in today's money. Some of the donations are listed as anonymous and a few as unknown, whilst others have designations such as:

- 10 guineas from *"A lady of quality"*;
- 2 guineas from *"Two young ladies, E.L and C.S"*;
- 1 guinea from *"A friend to Humanity"*;
- 2 guineas from *"A sick box, at the Red Lion in Church Street"*.

John Sharp and Josiah Wedgewood gave 5 guineas each: £681 in current equivalent. There were many donations larger than this, but they tended to be given by institutions, including church collections. There were several much larger individual donations of £21, and the two largest at £31/10s by *Samuel Whitbread Esq., MP*, the founder of the brewing dynasty and a strong advocate for abolition in the House of Commons, and *"Rt. Hon. Viscount Gallway"*, another MP.

The collection of this large sum of money coincided with John Sharp's mission with his sermon in 1787/88, which must have been associated, inter alia, with fund raising for the cause. The influence of Dr Sharp on the fund raising is assumed to be in three spheres: local, where he toured giving his sermons as listed above, at Durham Cathedral and in Cambridge University. There is no record of John giving the sermon in Cambridge itself but he was there during this period. On May 10th 1789, he preached his anti-slavery sermon at St Laurence, Wicken, about 20 miles NE of Cambridge. As a fellow and distinguished alumnus of Trinity College, it is hard to think that he did not visit the University when he was there. In total the record shows that Cambridge University and its colleges contributed £162 (£21,000 modern equivalent), compared to £42 contributed by Oxford (£5,445). The most significant contributor was John's Alma Mater, Trinity College. Second was St John's, the alma mater of William Wilberforce. Contributions from Cambridge in full were:

	£	S	D	2024 Equivalent Total £
General donations in the University	28	8	0	3,783
Bennett College	4	4	0	533
Trinity Hall	48	15	6	6,324
St John's College	28	17	6	3,744
Emmanuel College	11	0	6	1,429
Clare Hall	8	18	6	1,157
Sidney College	7	17	6	1,021
Christ College	6	16	6	885
St Peter's College	6	6		817
Caius College	6	6		817
Catharine Hall	3	13	6	476
Total collected at Cambridge University				20,986

Table 4: Total amounts collected at Cambridge University, as listed in the 1788 accounts

John Sharp's other influence was in the North East, where the main thrust of his preaching campaign was based. In total, where the location of donor can be identified from the record (i.e. not including anonymous donors or those that did not declare their location) Northumberland and Durham collected £90/10s/18d (£11,743 current equivalent), which stacks up well against the regional

committee collections listed earlier. This included £26/5s/0d (£3,403) from the prebendary canons (including John Sharp) at Durham Cathedral.

A search of the British Newspaper Archive reveals that fund raising for the Association was noted in the press at the time, with the Newcastle Courant printing numerous notices from individuals that had contributed, as well as publicising the fund raising activities of the Society. The Courant also reported on activities in the House of Commons following the work of the Society, including the lobbying by William Wilberforce. The only negative mention in the NE press noted from the search was a 'Cautionary' notice published in the Courant of Sat 12th April 1788, where an un-named correspondent commented (following the notice of 1 guinea being donated to the cause by 'a lady' at the Tyne Bank): *"The abolition of the slave trade, by our government alone, would only cheapen the price to the Dutch, French and Portuguese. Not a single African the less would be sold – humanity has therefore nothing to plead in favour of the measure – nor policy neither – unless it should be thought advisable to ruin our West India islands for the benefit of Hollanders and Frenchmen"*. Apart from this, it might be said that the local press was neutral on the matter of abolition.

Below is the page from the 1788 accounts that lists the Sharp family donations. John is at the head, followed by Granville. Next is his younger brother William, the surgeon. Next is their un-married sister Judith. It is not clear who the three further Sharps are and they may not be related. More research needed. Their sister Elizabeth donated 2 guineas under her married name, Mrs Prowse of Wicken Park, Northampton.

S

	£. s. d.	
Dowager Countess Stanhope, by G. Wilfon,		
Esq. - - - - -	50	0
Sampson and Mrs. Ringsford, of Canterbury,		
by Stephen Lowdell - - - - -	4	4
Church-Wardens of St. Thomas's, Southwark	6	16 6
Philip Sansom, Esq. London-street - - - - -	2	2
Mr. George Saunders - - - - -	1	1
Mr. William Saunders, Pool - - - - -	1	1
Mr. Isaac Sarjent, Melksham - - - - -	0	10 6
Mrs. Maria Scott, Millburn Port	0	10 6
Samuel Shore, Esq. Norton Hall	5	5
Rev. Dr. John Sharp, Archdeacon of Nor-		
thumberland - - - - -	5	5
Granville Sharp, Esq. Leadenhall-street - - - - -	5	5
William Sharp, Esq. Fulham - - - - -	5	5
Mrs. Judith Sharp, Nulham House	3	3
Mr. R. Sharp - - - - -	1	1
Mrs. Mary Sharp, Woodbridge - - - - -	1	1
Mr. George Sharp, Bishopsgate-street - - - - -	2	2
Mr. Isaac Sharples, Hitchin - - - - -	2	2
Mr. James Sheppard, Wapping-Wall - - - - -	2	2
William Shewin, Esq. Galway, Ireland - - - - -	2	12 6
Mr. Thomas Shackleton, Sunderland	1	1
Mr. James Six, Canterbury - - - - -	1	1
Mess. Smith, Nash, and Kemble, Cannon-street	5	5
William Smith, Esq. M. P. Clapham - - - - -	5	5
Mr. T. W. Smith, Great St. Helens	2	2
Mr. Joseph Smith, Cheap-side - - - - -	2	2

The page from the Society's 1788 accounts, showing donations from the Sharp family

William's name is significant. His stance on abolition must have brought him into conflict with at least some of his wealthy clients at his practise in the City of London, and possibly also royalty through his client HRH George III, but his conscience won out: possibly not surprising following his treatment of Jonathan Strong. Also significant is the absence of their brother James. James was a wealthy iron master who manufactured products including, inter alia, equipment for sugar mills in the West Indies: "My business has hitherto been chiefly to America and the West Indies"¹⁹. This would have given him a significant conflict of interest. It cannot be said whether his conscience led him to donate as one of the many 'anonymous' donors listed in the accounts but this is very likely. We get a suggestion as to where James's sympathies lay from the Jonathan Strong episode. The Memoirs of Granville Sharp, which includes first hand testament from Granville and Jonathan Strong, notes that : "In these charitable exertions Granville appears to have been seconded by his brother James. He

¹⁹ James Sharp's words in in 1770: Grant p.79.

*alludes to the circumstance, in a letter addressed to the Rev. Dr. Muysson (in Nov 1767), in which he mentions: "a law suit commenced against him and his brother James for having lawfully and openly obtained the liberty of a poor Negro before the chief magistrate of the city"*²⁰.

²⁰ Prince Hoare, 1828, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.*, Second Edition, London, Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street, p.53.