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Book Author(s): Jessica Moody

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## The Memorial Cult of William Roscoe

### Remembering Abolition

#### Introduction

For much of the last 200 years the public memory of the slave trade and slavery in Britain has been dominated by the public memory of – indeed the celebration of – abolition, abolitionists, and emancipation. The presentation of abolition and, moreover, emancipation as a ‘moral triumph’ in public discourse substituted, as John Oldfield has argued, ‘the horrors of slavery and the slave trade’ for a ‘culture of abolitionism’ in British public memory.<sup>1</sup> This ‘culture of abolition’ has constituted a ‘white mythology’, which Marcus Wood suggests, has been promoted and maintained through a carefully curated archive of abolitionist iconography, particularly within the visual record.<sup>2</sup> This pattern has actively re-encoded public memories of slavery through the comforting prism of abolition, whilst simultaneously keeping imagery of the enslaved ‘iconically imprisoned within the visual rhetorics of disempowerment, stereotypification, and passivity’.<sup>3</sup> Whilst this has been the dominant memorial paradigm within British commemorative work around the history of slavery and the slave trade, it is a pattern that is not so easily replicated within Liverpool. Not only was abolition presented as something Liverpool ‘overcame’ (see Chapter 1), but there was, historically, only a very small showing of abolition culture present in Europe’s foremost slave-trading port, especially in the form of overt, public, and vociferous campaigning abolitionists who had been active in other towns and cities. The ‘culture of abolitionism’ that has dominated British, European, and American

<sup>1</sup> Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Wood, *Blind Memory*, 7–8.

<sup>3</sup> Wood, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom*, 17.

public memory throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was most forcefully propagated through the valorizing of '[g]lorious white patriarchal philanthropists', such as William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson in Britain, William Lloyd Garrison and Abraham Lincoln in America, and Victor Schloelcher in France.<sup>4</sup> In Britain, it was Wilberforce, in particular, and his position as a Christian martyr hero, that was solidified in public memory, through memorials, inscribed texts, and museums.<sup>5</sup>

Liverpool cannot claim to have had any great number of open and active abolitionists who campaigned for the abolition of the slave trade in the years approaching 1807. However, William Roscoe, and his vote in favour of abolition as MP for Liverpool, whilst initially a point of conflict in local civic identity narratives in the early nineteenth century, has through memorialization and commemorative 'reframing' come to fulfil an abolitionist citizen-hero role. Roscoe's memory was actively, if awkwardly, reshaped and reframed across the nineteenth century to suit emerging national anti-slavery agendas, and alongside local shifts in identity and cultural contexts in the years after the abolition of the slave trade within which Liverpool's comparatively more active anti-slavery societies in the nineteenth century partook. This active memory-work over the last 200 years has forged a kind of 'memorial cult' around Roscoe as a civic figure. The cult of Roscoe has shaped this historic figure into an emblem of Liverpool's liberal cultural renaissance through ritual and round-number anniversaries, as an abolitionist hero to be drawn upon in twentieth and twenty-first-century public spotlights on the slave trade and slavery.

### Liverpool and Abolition

In view of the large proportion of Liverpool's political and commercial elite who had vested interests in the transatlantic slave trade, one of the greatest perceived contradictions of Liverpool's story of slavery is the involvement of some of the town's most celebrated citizens in campaigns for its abolition. William Roscoe (1753–1851) was a historian, poet, and banker in the town.<sup>6</sup> He wrote poetry in the eighteenth century that was critical of the slave trade, such as *The Wrongs of Africa* (1787) and *Mount Pleasant* (1777). Roscoe also wrote pamphlets in response to the Reverend Raymond Harris, a Spanish Jesuit priest who was awarded £100 by Liverpool Corporation as a positive endorsement for his pro-slavery literature. This exchange has been noted

4 Wood, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom*, 16.

5 Kowaleski Wallace, *The British Slave Trade and Public Memory*, 40.

6 He is most well-known for *The Life of Lorenzo de' Medici* (1796) and the poem *The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast* (1807).

and repeated throughout the written histories of post-abolition Liverpool.<sup>7</sup> In 1806 Roscoe was elected MP for Liverpool and in 1807 he voted in favour of the Abolition Act, though this had not featured prominently in his election campaign, and he arrived back in Liverpool to threats of violence (articulated with varying levels of emphasis in Liverpool's written histories).<sup>8</sup>

The exact extent of abolitionist activity in the town prior to abolition is an area of debate. The anonymous author of *Liverpool and Slavery* (1884), writing under the pseudonym 'Dicky Sam', emphasized that there were only two Liverpool names on the membership list of the 1787 Society for the Suppression of the Slave Trade, compared to the 10,000 in Manchester. The author entered into a back and forth conversation with himself in which he performs his own disbelief, building up to the final dismal figure:

Among the original names, how many belonged to Liverpool? Were there fifty? no; thirty? no; well, surely there were twenty? no; well, ten? no, then there could have not been less than five? Yes, there were less than five; then there must have been none? yes, there were some; well how many then? two!<sup>9</sup>

A year later, in 1788, however, a few more names, all members of the 'Roscoe Circle', were added to the society's list, which now stood at eight. The Roscoe Circle was a predominantly Unitarian network that emerged in the 1780s and 1790s and comprised a number of William Roscoe's contemporaries who were involved closely in local and national politics, the arts, sciences, and education, and, crucially, in the anti-slave trade movement.<sup>10</sup> Further, there were a number of other Liverpool notables

7 A complex engagement with this debate is reflected by James Picton who states in relation to this exchange that 'It would be useless to attempt to disinter arguments which are now utterly dead, repudiated and forgotten, and are only referred to as singular specimens of sophistry and perversity.' Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool*, vol. 1, 225.

8 Brian Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool,' in *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. David Richardson, Anthony Tibbles, and Suzanne Schwarz (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 292.

9 Anon, *Liverpool and Slavery*, 76–77. The two names were Quaker merchant and ship-owner William Rathbone (1726–89) and medical doctor, Dr Jonathan Binns (1747–1818).

10 Ian Sutton, 'Roscoe Circle (act. 1760s–1830s)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: OUP), [www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/101301](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/101301) (accessed 25 February 2014). The names on the 1788 list were Daniel Daulby, William Rathbone (jnr), William Roscoe, William Wallace, Reverend John Yates and an anonymous subscriber generally thought to have been Scottish physician and Wallace's son-in-law, Dr James Currie. See Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool,' 279.

who were involved in anti-slavery activities who did not sign the lists, such as the Reverend William Shepherd (Unitarian Minister at Gateacre) and Edward Rushton, the 'radical blind poet', formerly involved in the slave trade before contracting ophthalmia on board a slave ship, later founding the Liverpool School for the Blind.<sup>11</sup> As ever, this was a complicated social picture. As part of Liverpool's social elite, members of the Roscoe Circle lived and worked alongside slave traders and West India merchants.<sup>12</sup> It was this potential conflict, Brian Howman suggests, that led abolition advocates such as the physician Dr James Currie, to conduct so much of their anti-slavery activity anonymously.<sup>13</sup>

The legal abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade in 1807 did not end debates over Liverpool and slavery any more than it ended enslavement itself. A far greater level of organized abolitionist activity gained pace in the 1820s with the formation of the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery in 1822 and the Liverpool Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association in 1827, which distributed pamphlets nationally.<sup>14</sup> James Cropper was a vocal figure at the centre of these later campaigns and engaged in a public debate in the *Liverpool Mercury* and *Courier* with John Gladstone in 1823–24, though Gladstone wrote under the pseudonym *Mercator*.<sup>15</sup> To complicate the picture further, just as enslavement continued in British colonies into the 1830s and in the Americas into the 1860s, so did Liverpool's profits from the importation of goods produced by enslaved people. The Rathbone family, for example, though staunchly anti-slavery, profited greatly from the trade in American slave-grown cotton.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, public debate and publishing of the 1820s reflected a marked increase in anti-slavery campaigning in Liverpool from members of the Roscoe Circle and beyond. In 1824, the Reverend William Shepherd, under

11 Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool,' 283.

12 William Roscoe, for example, was business partners with slave trader Thomas Leyland, was associated with the Earle family and shared membership on committees for charitable institutions with the likes of John Gladstone, pro-slavery advocate and Chairman of the Liverpool West Indian Association. Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool,' 281.

13 Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool,' 281.

14 Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool,' 278, 89.

15 This correspondence was subsequently published separately by the West India Association for the interest of their members and in a form more permanent than 'the perishable columns of a newspaper.' The West India Association, *The Correspondence Between John Gladstone, Esq., M.P., and James Cropper Esq., on the Present State of Slavery in the British West Indies and in the United States of America; and on the Importation of Sugar from The British Settlements in India...* (Liverpool: Thomas Kaye, 1824).

16 Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool,' 281.

the pseudonym Timothy Touchstone, published *The True and Wonderful Story of Dick Liver*. A satirical history of the city, the text followed the life of 'Dick Liver' a personification of Liverpool. Shepherd, in a critical tract concerning the town's history of slave trading, outlined how 'I am sorry to be obliged to state, that for a season Dick turned kidnapper, having been accustomed to catch black men on the coast of Africa, and sell them by auction to the best bidder.'<sup>17</sup> Shepherd was equally critical of the response of the political elite, those with whom members of the Roscoe circle had been at odds for the past few decades:

When anybody intimated to him his opinion that this was not a fair kind of dealing, Dick was very peevish and cross – he looked as sour as vinegar, and made no answer to any remarks made on this branch of his traffic, but 'you be d—d!' or 'go look', or some such coarse phraseology. In short, it was observed, that while Dick was engaged in this business of kidnapping he grew more and more vulgar every day; and from a civil inoffensive gentleman, was fast degenerating into a blackguard.<sup>18</sup>

Shepherd presents the slave trade as warping Liver's character. By comparison, the abolition of the slave trade, which had caused Liver to 'curse the whole parliament', is shown to return Liverpool citizens to their natural good character; 'by its enforcement his manners have been very much mended'.<sup>19</sup>

By the following decade and the passing of the Emancipation Act (1833), more vocal support for abolition, or, more accurately, abolitionists can be seen within public discourse. In the 1834 edition of *The Picture of Liverpool*, a popular guide to the city, the treatment of slavery had lost the defensive tones expressed in the 1805 edition, and a language condemning slavery was adopted, with much descriptive flourish, although remnants of the complicated defensive tones remained within concerns for the 'profitability' of slavery, of:

that most nefarious, though profitable traffic in human thews and sinews; at the thought of which the heart sickens and the just indignation of every good man is excited. The merest outline of the portraiture of the practices of this inhuman, bloody, and iniquitous trade, must bring forth tears even from the most flinty hearted, and ought to suffuse the cheek of the most insatiably avaricious dealer with a blush of the deepest crimson.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Touchstone, *The True and Wonderful Story of Dick Liver*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Touchstone, *The True and Wonderful Story of Dick Liver*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Touchstone, *The True and Wonderful Story of Dick Liver*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Anon, *The Picture of Liverpool* (1834), 27–28.

## The Persistence of Memory

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Following this hearty condemnation, the author turns to the celebration of abolition and abolitionists. Whilst only Wilberforce is mentioned by name, this may have been due to the proximity of his death (1833) to the publication of this guide.<sup>21</sup> William Roscoe, who died in 1831, though discussed positively in a later section of this guide, is not publicly celebrated in relation to his anti-slavery activity. He is praised here, as elsewhere, largely for his literary and cultural credentials. The contestation over how to memorialize William Roscoe in the years and decades following his death illustrates some of the complexities of being anti-slavery in the 'slaving capital of the world'.

### The Memorial Cult of William Roscoe

William Roscoe has, over the last 200 years, become Liverpool's local counterpart to the national martyr-hero, William Wilberforce, frequently deployed within public discourse as a counter-argument to Liverpool's intense involvement in the slave trade and slavery. Held up as an abolitionist hero for voting for the Abolition Act of 1807, Roscoe has received martyr status through stories outlining the varying levels of violence he suffered at the hands of angry Liverpoolians upon returning from Parliament, and through the more 'economic' suffering of his bankruptcy. He too made great sacrifices, risked friendships and harm through his opposition to slavery, dying in 1831, only two years before Wilberforce and the passing of the Emancipation Act.

Roscoe's memory has, however, been fragmented and reorganized through processes of commemoration. The memory debate surrounding Roscoe has diverged over how he should be remembered: for his literary and cultural credentials, which were largely seen as uncontroversial, or for his politics, which divided commentators in the first half of the nineteenth century. Subsequent revisions of memory in the twentieth century brought Roscoe's anti-slavery sentiments to the fore within the context of a more comfortable and familiar national 'culture of abolitionism'. Discourse around Roscoe's round-number anniversaries of life and death inform the memory debate

21 'But thanks to the truly virtuous and benevolent exertions of Wilberforce, and other benefactors of the human race, whose persevering and pacific triumphs over demoniac brutality and cupidity, have earned for them laurels that shall never fade, and a name that shall never perish, and whose memories shall be cherished by the good of all nations and of all ages, when the fame and remembrance of the warrior, who has raised himself into notoriety by his achievements in arms, shall sleep in oblivion.' Anon, *The Picture* (1834), 28. This whole section remains word for word within the next edition of the guide three years later Anon, *The Picture of Liverpool* (1837).

surrounding his representation, constituting a distinct ‘cult of anniversary’.<sup>22</sup> Varying aspects of Roscoe’s life are stressed or downplayed at different points in time meaning that different ‘versions’ of William Roscoe have been drawn out of a schizophrenic catalogue of his character. Significantly, this is an interactive process in which commemorative actions from one anniversary influence further memory work in subsequent anniversaries in relation not only to Roscoe’s round numbers but others in Liverpool’s history, especially those connected with slavery and the slave trade.

The contested memorial cult around Roscoe began with the public announcement of his death. William Roscoe died 30 June 1831 and, on the day his death was announced in the local press, 1 July, *The Liverpool Mercury* was celebrating its own round-number anniversary of 20 years since its first publication. The announcement of Roscoe’s death ran directly after a piece concerning the *Mercury*’s history of humanitarian and liberal ideals, and its promotion of ‘the moral, social, and political improvement of our fellow men, of every country and every complexion’ were foregrounded.<sup>23</sup> The paper stated that some of these objectives have been achieved, and in an asterisked footnote the first Liverpool name given in relation to such achievements was Roscoe’s.<sup>24</sup> The piece immediately below this paragraph was the announcement of the death of 79-year-old William Roscoe, made whilst ink from ‘the foregoing paragraph was scarcely dry’.<sup>25</sup> Roscoe was described as ‘a philanthropist, a patriot, and a literary man’, who had far-reaching fame ‘not only in his own country, but throughout civilised Europe’. This point was repeated in another article, which framed Roscoe’s fame, literacy, and culture against criticisms of his hometown that ‘the learned of all countries have heard with surprise that Liverpool, once only known for its enormous commercial wealth, and its local and political importance, has given birth to the most distinguished of the historians of Europe’.<sup>26</sup> Two lines of poetry were quoted, adapted from their original use as John Dryden’s epitaph, ‘substituting the name of one poet for that of another’, replacing the name of a former Poet Laureate with Roscoe’s: ‘[r]eader, attend,-the sacred dust below / Was Roscoe once,-the rest who

22 See Johnston, *Celebrations: The Cult of Anniversaries*.

23 ‘Completion of the Twentieth Year of the Mercury,’ *The Liverpool Mercury*, 1 July 1831.

24 In the very first few editions of the paper in 1811 Roscoe wrote letters to Henry Brougham (1778–1868), Whig candidate for Liverpool at this time, advocating for parliamentary reform, and the article outlines how this would later become a cause for which Brougham showed support (as Lord Chancellor) and that Roscoe may hopefully ‘live to see the great experiment fairly tried.’ ‘Completion of the Twentieth Year of the Mercury’.

25 ‘The Late William Roscoe, Esq,’ *The Liverpool Mercury*, 1 July 1831.

26 ‘Monument to the Memory of Roscoe,’ *The Liverpool Mercury*, 15 July 1831.

does not know.<sup>27</sup> The adapted lines came from Dryden's burial monument in Westminster Abbey and, in relation to this context, the piece claimed that by contrast 'Roscoe needs no monument, except in the hearts of his numerous friends.' However, the need to find some way of memorializing Roscoe was expressed in relation to the 'debt of gratitude' Liverpool people owed to 'the memory of this excellent man'.<sup>28</sup>

In subsequent eulogies, Roscoe was described as an 'elegant and enlightened historian and scholar' publicly and privately (among 'more immediate friends') who expressed true Christian spirit, charity and firmness of opinion.<sup>29</sup> His support for 'civil and religious liberty' and, in particular, his work advocating for parliamentary reform, was stressed, as was his concern for prison discipline.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps his support for the abolition of slavery was being hinted at in the lines '[t]he moral courage and integrity of mind which it required to maintain his opinions in earlier life, can only be fully estimated by those who know the circumstances in which he commenced his career in the world.'<sup>31</sup> As this veiled reference demonstrates, public discourse surrounding Roscoe's life at this point touched problematically on his opposition to slavery, appearing in opaque hints or embedded within general assessments of his support for 'the unhappy outcasts of society'.<sup>32</sup> However, a very personal account sent to the local press by a 'fair townswoman', who had known Roscoe for 13 years, did reference his anti-slavery sentiments. In a long letter, taking up close to an entire column in the *Mercury*, the author stressed Roscoe's support for abolition in the face of opposition from his own townsmen, claiming this to be more important than his advocacy of literature and the arts:

27 'The Late William Roscoe, Esq.' Original lines by Alexander Pope in relation to John Dryden, intended as his epitaph on his monument in Westminster Abbey, erected by Sheffield Duke of Buckingham 'This Sheffield raised. — The sacred dust below / Was Dryden once; the rest who does not know.' From Theophilus Cibber and Robert Shiels, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. II (London: R. Griffiths, 1753).

28 'The Late William Roscoe, Esq.'

29 'Death of William Roscoe, Esq,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 1 July 1831.

30 'Death of William Roscoe, Esq.' Roscoe is also described as a 'friend of civil and religious liberty' in a eulogy within the London-based *Morning Chronicle*, quoted within 'The Late William Roscoe, extract from Morning Chronicle,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 8 July 1831.

31 'Death of William Roscoe, Esq.'

32 T.S.T., 'Letter: Proposal for Erecting a Monument to the Memory of Roscoe,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 22 July 1831. The author is most likely Dr Thomas Stewart Traill (1781–1862), originally from Orkney but moved to Liverpool in 1804 where he established a medical practice and became a part of Liverpool's cultural elite and of Roscoe's social circle. 'Traill, Thomas Stewart (1781–1862),' Brenda M. White in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: OUP), [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27662](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27662) (accessed 26 June 2013).

The slave trade flourished, and was a prolific source of wealth and aggrandisement to many of his contemporaries and associates. He condemned it with an uncompromising steadfastness; he kept the interests of human nature in view, and disregarded the clamour and hostility that assailed him. As 'the lion shakes the dew-drops from his mane', he made light of impediments that would have suspended the usefulness of an inferior nature, opposing, as he did, the prejudices and pecuniary interests of a numerous class of his townsmen, yet so deep was their conviction, as a body, of his superior merits, that they sent him as their representative to Parliament, where he had the proud satisfaction of being amongst those who decided that our country should no more be disgraced by a traffic in mankind. On this question he had long fought the good fight, and he shared in the glorious reward of a triumph so dear to humanity.<sup>33</sup>

Framed in religious language and imagery familiar to the sentimental rhetoric of anti-slavery discourse, Roscoe is here represented as the good Christian martyr-hero, who fought in opposition to many the 'good fight', and received the 'glorious reward' of abolition.<sup>34</sup> He shook criticism and prejudice off, as 'the lion shakes the dew-drops from his mane', a familiar line in anti-slavery discourse, used that year during the general meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society on 23 April as a metaphor for rousing moral awareness and action in response to plantation slavery.<sup>35</sup>

In the national press, by comparison, Roscoe's opposition to the slave trade was more readily referenced. In the *Morning Chronicle* a eulogy foregrounded his anti-slavery views against the general mercantile attitudes of his hometown, that,

[n]ot, however, all his zeal for the local interests of that great mart of commerce could prevail over that more enlarged passion of philanthropy which he cherished throughout life. He was among the first to denounce the slave trade (in one of his early poems) and he had the happiness to assist in the deliberations of the Legislature which ratified its abolition.<sup>36</sup>

33 F.M.S., 'The Late Mr. Roscoe,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 22 July 1831.

34 See Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

35 'Man-stealing was permitted, and slaves were brought in thousands to our colonies, until at length the clanking of their chains aroused the lion from his slumbers: but now he shakes the dew-drops from his mane, and raises his terrific voice, and the West India hydra trembles before him.' Reverend J. Burnett, 'General Meeting', *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 4:8 (1831): 275.

36 'The Late William Roscoe, extract from Morning Chronicle.'

Here, the 'local' interests of Liverpool's commercial activities are presented in opposition to the presumably more 'national', and thereby more significant, abolition campaign and subsequent Act. The slave trade is localized to Liverpool in this memorial piece, in a way that detaches the trade from Britain, in favour of the national abolition campaign, though here promoted through the reification of an 'abolitionist' figure.

Despite the *Mercury's* previous assertion that Roscoe's memory did not require a monument, the paper supported a proposal for one on 15 July 1831, calling for contributions to the project.<sup>37</sup> One letter of support for the scheme considered it unthinkable that Liverpool people could 'permit the tomb to close over the remains of Roscoe, without some durable memorial of their admiration of his talents'.<sup>38</sup> The author suggests that to not give Roscoe a memorial on the grounds that great men do not require them is a cheap solution, 'a base and selfish apology, set up by avarice', and framed the need to memorialize Roscoe by foregrounding the construction of civic identity through competitive place comparisons:

[I]f the comparatively small town of Penzance, eager to record that it gave birth to Davy, has already decreed a pyramid of granite to the memory of its great philosopher, -shall opulent Liverpool be forgetful of what it owes to the memory of its Roscoe? Certainly not.<sup>39</sup>

If small and, perhaps, thereby insignificant Penzance can undertake such civic duties to its heroes of place, so should Liverpool, a town continually aware of the accusations of cultural ignorance as a centre of commerce, not of arts. The author, in turn, called for funds to be raised for a suitable '*public memorial*', its 'public' quality here stressed as significant through italics.

In a public (though sparsely attended) meeting held to discuss the proposed memorial, William Wallace Currie (1784–1840), son of the physician and biographer of Robert Burns James Currie (1756–1805), suggested that, in light of Roscoe's international fame, it was the duty of the citizens of Liverpool 'to let foreigners see that they had not been less conscious of the great and admirable qualities of their illustrious townsman than foreigners were'.<sup>40</sup> A physical memorial, it was supposed, would be one way of demonstrating this. The form the monument should take caused considerable debate, and suggestions included a public fountain,

<sup>37</sup> John Gibson (1790–1866) was suggested as sculptor for this memorial. Gibson had been acquainted with Roscoe, who let the sculptor use his library for studying Italian design. 'Monument to the Memory of Roscoe.'

<sup>38</sup> T.S.T., 'Letter: Proposal for Erecting a Monument to the Memory of Roscoe.'

<sup>39</sup> T.S.T., 'Letter: Proposal for Erecting a Monument to the Memory of Roscoe.'

<sup>40</sup> 'Monument to the Late Wm. Roscoe, Esq.,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 5 August 1831.

bronze statue, and observatory. Roscoe's opposition to slavery was raised in a letter by a W.J. Roberts and read aloud by William Rathbone within this meeting, in which it was suggested that Roscoe could rest easy having seen so many causes close to his heart realized, such as 'the abolition of slavery'.<sup>41</sup> To this, Roberts asked whether Liverpool will appear 'ungrateful and indifferent', as it did when it permitted the sale of his library during bankruptcy. His birthplace, Mount Pleasant, also the title of one of his better known poems, was designated within this letter as an appropriate site of memory for Roscoe – '[t]his spot is become sacred to his memory' – and it is here, Roberts suggests, that a Greco-Roman style monument would be most appropriate in the middle of an area the size of Abercromby Square. Interestingly, Roberts suggested that the design should incorporate allusions to Roscoe's work, one panel of which should show, "'The Wrongs of Africa,' the manacles falling from the arms of the slaves &c.'<sup>42</sup> However, Dr Traill responded to this suggestion with the accusation that such 'political sentiments of Mr. Roscoe might give rise to differences of opinion, and might produce discord'.<sup>43</sup>

Efforts to memorialize William Roscoe would continue to be haunted by Roscoe's opposition to slavery, and it would be some ten years before any kind of dedicated tangible public memorial to Roscoe was created. Whilst a statue had been commissioned in 1835, in 1840 a brief press debate highlighted this as a contentious process. An anonymous letter, written by 'A Native of Liverpool', asked why there was at this stage no memorial to Roscoe in Liverpool, and questioned why Roscoe's 'memory should be apparently obliterated from our recollection', especially disgraceful for Liverpool, 'the wealth of whose Corporation is so generally known?'<sup>44</sup> The editor responded by publishing a note from J. Mayer on the progress of a statue of Roscoe, undertaken by sculptor Francis Chantrey, which he stated was nearing

41 I suspect this is William Roberts (1767–1849), a barrister and writer based at this time in Clapham and who was close friends with William Wilberforce and Hannah More. More was also close to Roberts's sisters, and Roberts published a biography of More in 1834. He had also been made a commissioner in bankruptcy between 1812 and 1832, which would explain his comments on Roscoe's bankruptcy. G. Le G. Norgate, 'Roberts, William (1767–1849),' rev. Rebecca Mills, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: OUP), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23778> (accessed 26 June 2013).

42 W.J. Roberts, quoted in 'Monument to the Late Wm. Roscoe, Esq.'

43 This point was supported in the meeting by Ashton Yates. 'Monument to the Late Wm. Roscoe, Esq.'

44 A Native of Liverpool, 'Letter: Roscoe,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 27 March 1840.

completion.<sup>45</sup> Mayer also suggested that the location of the completed statue should be in front of the Lyceum Newsroom, facing Church Street, a point that the editor supported.<sup>46</sup> However, just over a month later, a critical letter was published in the *Standard* about this exchange. The author of this letter, 'G', suggested that there was controversy over memorialising Roscoe because of his political views:

From the manner in which this matter of a statue of Roscoe was first brought before the people of Liverpool, by an anonymous correspondent of the *Mercury*, it appears that it is not to be erected in honour of his literary, but of his political character; if so, then Delta is right in objecting to this being considered the work of the town.<sup>47</sup>

The *Liverpool Standard and General Commercial Advertiser* (1832–56), published twice weekly by Samuel Franceys, was set up as a conservative, Protestant voice. It took a stance against 'the groundswell of liberal sentiment that surrounded the Reform Bill' of which Roscoe was an advocate. Significantly, one of the leaders in the first issue of 1832 (November) advised voters to ignore 'the propaganda of the Anti-Slavery Society' and the paper openly supported colonial slavery on the grounds that 'Negroes' actual progress towards civilization was doubtful.<sup>48</sup> The *Mercury* and *Standard* were rival papers, and the editor of the *Mercury* suggested that the letter from 'G' was a misrepresentation, or even a falsehood, which did not merit surprise given 'that truth is rarely deemed a necessary auxiliary to Tory logic'.<sup>49</sup> Further, the editor of the *Mercury* suggested that G's statements were meant to 'prejudice the Tories, who are very numerous in the Lyceum Newsroom, against the motion, if it should ever be made, for placing Mr. Roscoe's statue in the area of the building'.<sup>50</sup> The editor also drew attention to a letter from 1834 calling for a memorial to Roscoe in which his politics were not mentioned, suggesting that the original public subscription for a memorial would have been made on the merits of 'private worth and the literary reputation of a distinguished and lamented townsman', which gained support even from those who disagreed on his politics. 'G' also took issue with the statue being erected 'by the town' if it was to honour his politics, to which the editor

45 Terry Cavanagh, *Public Sculpture of Liverpool*, 284–85.

46 J. Mayer, 'Letter: Roscoe,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 27 March 1840.

47 'G' quoted in 'Statue of Roscoe,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 1 May 1840.

48 Laurel Brake, Marysa Demoor, and Margaret Beetham, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism: In Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent: Academia Press, 2009), 369–70.

49 'Statue of Roscoe.'

50 'Statue of Roscoe.'

of the *Mercury* responded that the statue was in fact raised by 'voluntary contributions'.

The fate of this much-debated statue of Roscoe in the later nineteenth century reflects the developing memorial cult around Roscoe as 'citizen-hero'. The statue was the first of many new portrait sculptures marking a new phase in Liverpool's history of public sculpture, which sought to celebrate 'local worthies' through public commemoration.<sup>51</sup> Designed by sculptor Sir Francis Legatt Chantry (1781–1841), the statue was exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1840, then moved to the Liverpool Royal Institution in 1841 where it stayed for over half a century. A large marble work, the sculpture shows Roscoe sitting and clothed in classical attire, holding a book, right arm crossing his chest. A collection of pictures and sculpture, including this statue, was due to be transferred from the Institution to the Walker Art Gallery in 1893. However it was decided through an agreement with the council in January that year that because Roscoe was not solely 'an art patron' but 'also a man of letters, and of a citizen conspicuous in his public service to Liverpool' it would be more appropriate if the statue were moved to St George's Hall.<sup>52</sup> St George's Hall, the grand jewel in the architectural crown of nineteenth-century Liverpool, the ultimate symbol of civic pride in a 'thriving' imperial city, and new space for potential public commemoration of Liverpool men, was seen as the rightful resting place of this memorial statue to one of her greatest citizens.<sup>53</sup> It was transferred to St George's Hall in June 1893, although it was dropped and badly damaged during transit to the north vestibule, also damaging the hall floor.<sup>54</sup> Expertise was drawn in from the British Museum and the city corporation paid for the restoration of the statue.<sup>55</sup> The statue of Roscoe now sits in one of 12 'niches' in the great concert hall, alongside other nineteenth-century 'worthies' including railway engineer George Stephenson and slave-owner and MP John Gladstone.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond this statue and the debates surrounding it, further memorial activity seeking to reframe Roscoe's memory came to the public fore particularly during round number anniversaries of his birth and death.<sup>57</sup>

51 Cavanagh, *Public Sculpture in Liverpool*, xi.

52 Letter from Charles W. Stubbs, President of the Liverpool Royal Institution to Liverpool City Council. Quoted in 'The Roscoe Statue,' *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 January 1893.

53 Cavanagh, *Public Sculpture of Liverpool*, xi.

54 'The Roscoe Statue: An Unfortunate Accident,' *Liverpool Mercury*, 13 June 1893.

55 'Liverpool Library Committee: The Roscoe Statue: The Derby Bequest,' *Liverpool Mercury*, 28 July 1893.

56 Joseph Sharples and Richard Pollard, *Liverpool (Pevsner Architectural Guides)* (New Haven, CT, London: Yale University Press, 2004), 56.

57 However, alternative 'memory artefacts' were produced following Roscoe's death,

The opening of Liverpool Museum (now World Museum Liverpool) was timed to coincide with the celebrations around Roscoe's centenary of birth, though the latter were of a larger scale in the city. The memory of William Roscoe, a celebrated figure of the arts, was used alongside the opening of a new civic institution crucial to mid nineteenth-century ideals of citizenship and culture.<sup>58</sup> During the centenary of Roscoe's birth (1853), a collection of what Liverpool historian and librarian George Chandler described as 'Roscoeana', material relating to William Roscoe and the commemorations that year, was compiled by Roscoe's son-in-law, Thomas Brooks, and the collection subsequently added to by Liverpool Libraries.<sup>59</sup> The collection included programmes of events for the 'Roscoe Festival' that year, paintings and illustrations of Roscoe and his life, the commemorative collection of his poems published in 1853, ribbons from his parliamentary campaign, and a lock of his hair in an envelope. Literature commemorating the centenary highlighted Roscoe's anti-slavery sentiments in more depth than much of the press coverage around his death, particularly in a leaflet outlining events, which presented Roscoe's anti-slavery stance against Liverpool's own large investment in the trade:

In the town of Liverpool, which then received a profit of three or four hundred thousand a-year from the slave trade, and which did not at that time possess any other trade which produced the fourth-part of that profit, he began his war against that detestable traffic in the year 1771, before he was twenty years of age, and never ceased it until he appeared as member for Liverpool, in the House of Commons, to vote for its abolition.<sup>60</sup>

The piece drew attention to the lack of leader articles and newspapers that could promote the cause, especially since many of those that were in circulation at the time were funded by 'the patronage of the slave-dealers'. William Roscoe was presented as the sole reason people in Liverpool were alerted to the wrongs of slavery. Without Roscoe, the article argued, 'the

with adverts appearing for a commemorative medal engraved by Scipio Clint, the king's medallist and *The Life of William Roscoe* by son, Henry Roscoe (1800–33) coming out in 1833. 'Advert: Medal of the Late William Roscoe, Esq,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 5 August 1831; 'News in Brief – Roscoe,' *The Liverpool Mercury*, 5 August 1831.

<sup>58</sup> John Millard, *Liverpool's Museum: The First 150 Years* (Liverpool: National Museums Liverpool, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool*, 135; Thomas Brooks, *Centenary of William Roscoe: The Philanthropist, Poet & Historian. Album Containing a Collection of Pamphlets, News Cuttings, Portraits, Illustrations, Election Ribbons, etc.* (1853) LRO 920 ROS. 'Roscoeana' was a phrase in use in nineteenth-century Liverpool for Roscoe-related subjects.

<sup>60</sup> Brooks, *Centenary of William Roscoe*.

people of Liverpool would scarcely have had anyone to warn them that man-stealing was a crime'. Interestingly, the article aligned Roscoe's position in Liverpool to abolitionists in the contemporary US South, suggesting that '[f]or nearly thirty years the position of Roscoe in Liverpool was nearly as painful (though not so dangerous) as that of an Abolitionist would be at the present time at Charleston or New Orleans.'<sup>61</sup> The birth centenary of 1853 inspired new calls for another public memorial (in addition to the statue erected previously) as well as commemorative street names such as Roscoe Street and Roscoe Lane, with one commentator suggesting that Lime Street be renamed Roscoe Street as it was in a more prominent position, and the first street to greet visitors by train.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps spurred on by this increase in public discourse around Roscoe through commemorative activity, a further monument was erected in 1856 in the Unitarian Church which stood on Renshaw Street (Roscoe was buried in the churchyard behind this). The inscription chosen, 'Historian, poet, patriot, and Christian philanthropist', did not explicitly foreground Roscoe as an 'abolitionist'.<sup>63</sup>

After this point and across the last half of the nineteenth century, however, Roscoe's connections to abolition start to become more readily referenced in public discourse. This shift in emphasis occurred alongside a general reframing of the British Empire as distinctly 'anti-slavery', and rising Victorian ideals of citizenship centred on morality, Christianity, and philanthropy.<sup>64</sup> Such efforts were of course taking place around the country, and towns and cities were choosing figures from their pasts to forge new memorial cults. For Liverpool, aware of external criticisms of its status as a centre of commerce more than a centre of arts, and in some ways still reeling from heightened levels of criticism of being the centre of the slave trade against anti-slavery national identity ideals, Roscoe became 'reframed' in ways that emphasized and drew on the contradictions of being anti-slavery in the slaving capital of the world. In 1884, the 50-year anniversary of the passing of the Emancipation Act, the liberal *Liverpool Review* bemoaned this absence of public commemoration of Roscoe as being particularly abhorrent when considering Liverpool's large role in the slave trade and comparatively small number of open abolitionists:

Liverpool in the course of its career of prosperous traffic has not produced so many eminent men that it can afford to let the memory of one of the earliest and most distinguished of them sink into comparative oblivion.

61 Brooks, *Centenary of William Roscoe*.

62 Civic 'Roscoe Memorials' clipping in Brooks, *Centenary of William Roscoe*.

63 This monument was erected by worshippers of the church. Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool*, vol. 1, 433. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the congregation (and the Roscoe memorial bust) moved to a new location in Ullet Road, near Sefton Park.

64 See Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*.

Roscoe lives in his works no doubt, but how is it that Liverpool has been so apathetic in claiming the parentage of a son so well calculated to add a much-needed lustre to her merely commercial eminence. As a literary man, as a man of widely extended taste and culture, as a man of the most liberal sympathies, and, above all as the champion and one of the emancipators of the slaves there is no name in all our local history we should more honour ourselves by honouring than that of Roscoe.<sup>65</sup>

The extent to which Roscoe had been 'speaking out' against the attitudes of his own townsmen became foregrounded as a key component of his Christian values and strength of moral character, comparable in one instance to other religious philanthropic ventures of the later nineteenth century. As the, presumably anonymous author, 'Robin Hood' suggested in one of a series of articles published in *The Commercial World* in 1893:

The old Dicky Sams looked upon them [William Rathbone and William Roscoe] as visionaries, with considerably less favour than some of us regard General Booth and his schemes for raising our white slaves from a lower depth than even the hold of a slave ship.<sup>66</sup>

Here, 'one of Liverpool's greatest men, the noble and scholarly William Roscoe' is compared to William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army (1878), who also faced opposition for the work of the mission which strove to help such 'white slaves' from fates apparently worse than the middle passage in Victorian Britain.<sup>67</sup> By 1897, in Gomer Williams's history of Liverpool privateers and the slave trade, Roscoe appears fully acknowledged in a chapter on abolition, as 'the man who had the courage to deliver this straight blow from the shoulder at the favourite sin of his native town'.<sup>68</sup>

During the centenary of Roscoe's death in 1931, his identity as an 'abolitionist' was more openly framed and celebrated. His individual story, moreover, reflected Liverpool's own collective historic identity narratives. Lengthy press articles celebrated Roscoe in ways that emphasized his 'rags to riches story', mirroring the narratives presented of Liverpool's own meteoric rise from small fishing village to mighty seaport. Roscoe was said to have 'educated himself and rose to eminence', and was a 'botanist who started by

65 'Slave-Owning Liverpool,' *Liverpool Review of Politics, Society, Literature and Art*, 23 August 1884. This was part of a series of articles across a number of editions of this publication concerning Liverpool and slavery.

66 Robin Hood, 'The Liverpool Slave Trade,' *Liverpool Commercial World*, 4 March 1893.

67 Robin Hood, 'The Liverpool Slave Trade,' *Liverpool Commercial World*, 11 March 1893.

68 Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 569.

labouring in potato-fields'.<sup>69</sup> This was presented against his contradictory standing as a public figure, 'execrated by the mob, yet given the freedom of his city', he was 'a banker who crashed from wealth to poverty', perhaps mirroring Liverpool's own tumultuous economic life, from second city of empire to the lows of Depression era 1930s. Roscoe's opposition to slavery was emphasized through his poetry and his parliamentary vote.<sup>70</sup>

The public celebration of Roscoe's opposition to slavery, had become not only more acceptable by 1931, but was given greater elevation. Perhaps this was, as one article suggested, because '[t]ime clarifies our estimates of our fellows', meaning that 'in Roscoe's case, we can now perceive his towering moral stature as distinguished from the concrete manifestations of his career'.<sup>71</sup> The passing of time may have alleviated some of the sensitivities around celebrating Roscoe's moral stance on issues close to the hearts of Liverpool's mercantile elite. The promotion of Roscoe's stance against slavery, moreover, his rebranding as an 'abolitionist-hero', also aligned more acceptably with preparations for the centenary of emancipation and centenary of the death of William Wilberforce. This version of Roscoe also more readily reflected national discourses of Britain's anti-slavery empire in the later nineteenth century, presenting a nationally coherent 'hero' during a time of much economic uncertainty for Liverpool. His greatest strengths were presented as his 'energies' for change and action, which included being 'a channel for the emancipatory fervour of the period. His active opposition to the slave trade, in Parliament and in the Press, obviously required no little courage in those days'.<sup>72</sup> Courage, energy and an active stance on political issues were qualities distinctly relevant to 1930s Liverpool, and indeed Britain, and a 'tradition' of campaigning around moral issues was presented as ongoing: 'it is pleasant to think that in the century which has passed since 1831, Liverpool, despite the growing urgency of material preoccupations, has never ceased to forward the ideals he set forth'.<sup>73</sup>

Two years later, more direct and excessively exaggerated estimations of Roscoe's abolitionist credentials were presented alongside both the centenary of the Emancipation Act and the centenary of the death of Britain's leading

69 'A Maker of Liverpool – Life and Work of William Roscoe,' *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 24 June 1931.

70 'Roscoe's hatred of the slave trade on which Liverpool thrived was first recorded in verse when he was nineteen. Nor did his concern for slaves welfare end with the triumphant abolition of the trade, a triumph for which, as a Member of Parliament, he shared the credit.' 'A Maker of Liverpool – Life and Work of William Roscoe.'

71 'William Roscoe,' *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 30 June 1931.

72 'William Roscoe.'

73 'William Roscoe.'

abolitionist, William Wilberforce.<sup>74</sup> In an article concerning 'Wilberforce and Liverpool: His Friends and Supports', published to mark the centenary of Wilberforce's death, it is noted that 'Roscoe began to fight the slave trade at Liverpool a few years earlier than did Wilberforce [...] Roscoe and Wilberforce corresponded and met regularly over a long period, and were on terms of friendship.'<sup>75</sup>

Following the centenary celebrations of 1931, the Roscoe family donated his private papers to the Picton Library.<sup>76</sup> The donation of these papers, 'together with the shabby old chest, in which they have always lived', were given to the library as 'a mark of appreciation of the Roscoe Centenary Exhibition' that year, a move which in turn led to the production of a new biography researched and written by City Librarian George Chandler.<sup>77</sup> Chandler's biography of Roscoe, which included a fuller collection of his poetry than had previously been published, was sponsored by the city council, and published to coincide with Roscoe's bicentenary of birth in 1953. In Sir Alfred Shennan's lengthy and detailed introduction to this book (at points more detailed than Chandler's main text), Roscoe was presented as the 'founder of Liverpool culture'.<sup>78</sup> Shennan suggested that the book was important for re-evaluating William Roscoe and his impact on Liverpool, to see his achievements and his influence in the context of 'a town which throughout his life was chiefly hostile to his ideals', and the conflicts of having to do business, especially banking, in a town that dealt in slave trading, was again emphasized.<sup>79</sup> Chandler presented Roscoe as central to Liverpool's cultural development, almost as the embodiment of Liverpool's renaissance, since 'there is hardly any movement or institution in modern Liverpool that does not owe some part of its existence or tradition to his

<sup>74</sup> See Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom* for a discussion of the national marking of Emancipation. I have discussed the way this was commemorated in Liverpool (in comparison to her rival former slave trade port city, Bristol) elsewhere. See Moody, 'Remembering the Imperial Context of Emancipation Commemoration in the Former British Slave-Port Cities of Bristol and Liverpool.'

<sup>75</sup> 'Wilberforce and Liverpool: His Friends and Supporters,' *Liverpool Daily Post*, 29 July 1933.

<sup>76</sup> A further donation was also made by a great-granddaughter of Roscoe's, Lady Margaret Mallet. 'Liverpool Corporation has reaped a rich reward...', *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 23 November 1931.

<sup>77</sup> LRO, Liverpool, Roscoe Papers: Correspondence, Newscuttings, Lists, etc. Concerning the Books, Manuscripts, Drawings, etc. Relating to William Roscoe, Donated by Members of the Roscoe family. 820.1 PAP Letter from William Roscoe, jnr, to the City Librarian; J.J. Bagley, 'The Bicentenary of William Roscoe,' *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 105 (1954).

<sup>78</sup> Alfred Shennan, 'Introduction,' in Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool*, xv.

<sup>79</sup> Shennan, 'Introduction,' xv.

work.<sup>80</sup> Copies of Chandler's biography of Roscoe would later that decade be given as gifts to visiting signatories as part of the city's 750th charter anniversary celebrations in 1957 (see Chapter 3).

Chandler stressed Roscoe's anti-slavery activities through hyperbole and generalization, and against a discursive mitigation of the extent of Liverpool's involvement and financial benefit from the slave trade, since he was 'leader of the movement against the slave trade (although this was believed to be the foundation of Liverpool's prosperity)'. Here, Chandler casts doubt over the impact and significance of the slave trade to Liverpool which was only 'believed' to be foundational. However, within the chapter titled, amusingly perhaps, 'Marriage and the Slave Trade', covering the years 1781-90, Chandler did acknowledge the significance of the slave trade to Liverpool, though this was done in a manner that avoided exploration of its impacts and workings in the town in favour of a discussion of privateering and the French Revolution, apparently for contextual reasons.<sup>81</sup> Familiar discursive lines were drawn upon within the (brief) discussion of slavery, that Liverpool 'secured large portions of the traffic in negro slaves, leaving their chief rivals, London and Bristol, far behind', but that, reassuringly, '[s]laves were not, of course, brought to Liverpool in large numbers'.<sup>82</sup>

In 1953, to mark the bicentenary of Roscoe's birth, a church ceremony was held in Ullet Road and a commemorative event also took place at the Bluecoat Hall, which was attended by 400 people including Roscoe's descendants. Mr J. Chuter Ede, MP for South Shields and former Home Secretary, spoke at the event, describing Roscoe as 'a man who fought for causes which now had triumphed and were part of the English heritage', suggesting that a lack of informal education may have led him to his moral beliefs. Reverend Lawrence Redfern, a Unitarian minister, claimed that it was Roscoe's religious faith that had enabled him to see through his public-spirited notions, even when it might have appeared that he had made a mistake supporting such causes:

I often think that the worst that can befall a reformer is to find that the emancipated have themselves turned into tyrants like the slaves of St.

80 Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool*, 2.

81 The connection made in this title apparently due to biographical chronology, against expressed through a martyr framework, that '[i]t is typical of Roscoe that he should have devoted the first year of his married life to the preparation of material for this idealistic poem', referring to *The Wrongs of Africa*. Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool*, 60.

82 Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool*, 60.

## The Persistence of Memory

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Domingo or the French revolutionaries. That happened to Roscoe; but he was right and his panic-stricken contemporaries were wrong.<sup>83</sup>

In longer press articles about Roscoe at this time, Roscoe was again presented as a versatile renaissance man, as '[p]oet, artist, philosopher, historian, agriculturalist, botanist, politician, and philanthropist – he was all these things and a capable lawyer and business man as well'.<sup>84</sup> A point was also made about Roscoe having been 'one of the first to denounce' the slave trade, but 'could hope for little support in the city which was one of the chief centres of the traffic'.<sup>85</sup>

A wreath-laying ceremony also took place in 1953 at Roscoe's grave in Roscoe Gardens, Mount Pleasant, led by the lord mayor (Alderman A. Morrow), with red roses (symbolic of Roscoe's Lancashire roots) and Cyprus leaves (for his associations with Italy).<sup>86</sup> The Roscoe Gardens remain on the site of the original graveyard of Renshaw Street Chapel today, where an octagonal domed memorial sits centrally, commemorating the church.<sup>87</sup> The monument included a memorial plaque that commemorated some of the people who were buried in the grounds, including William Roscoe, without an assessment of his character, 'In memory of / the worshippers / within its walls / and of / William Roscoe / Joseph Blanco White / and all who were laid to rest / in this ground'.<sup>88</sup>

The charter celebrations of 1957, celebrating Liverpool's 750th birthday, placed increased focus on Roscoe as an abolitionist compared to those in 1907. This was particularly the case in local press articles. George Chandler foregrounded William Roscoe's 'success' in voting for the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and titled one article, 'William Roscoe and the Abolition of the Slave Trade', forging a definitive connection between the man and the moment, though only the last three paragraphs of this long article actually discussed abolition – the rest focused entirely on Roscoe's life and work more generally.<sup>89</sup> Great significance was given to Roscoe's brief political career,

83 '400 honour Liverpool historian,' *Liverpool Daily Post*, 9 March 1953.

84 I.W.P. Roberts, 'After 200 Years Liverpool Still Honours His Name – The Life and Fame of William Roscoe,' *Liverpool Daily Post*, 6 March 1953.

85 I.W.P. Roberts, 'After 200 Years Liverpool Still Honours His Name.'

86 'Roscoe Bi-Centenary Wreath,' *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7 March 1953; 'Civic tribute on City Poet's Bi-Centenary,' *Liverpool Daily Post*, 6 March 1953.

87 Erected in 1905 it was built by the architect Thomas Shelmerdine and designed by Ronald P. Jones. Cavanagh, *Public Sculpture of Liverpool*, 116; Sharples and Pollard, *Liverpool*, 210.

88 Cavanagh, *Public Sculpture of Liverpool*, 116.

89 'William Roscoe led the movement for the abolition of the slave trade and was successful in 1807 in voting for its abolition during his brief period as Member

which was 'of great historical importance' since '[h]e spoke up for Reform, and against the slave trade, casting his vote successfully for its abolition in 1807'. From this, Chandler held Roscoe up 'as the symbol for Liverpool's moral progress at the time of its sixth centenary', his vote having been 'one of the delightful paradoxes of history'.<sup>90</sup> This retrospectively, and artificially, connected 1957 with 1807 through the imagined commemorative tradition of the charter anniversary; further building the foundation myth of the 1207 charter through false memory, as the 'sixth centenary' was in fact never marked, the public charter celebrations only beginning in 1907.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, and despite the rather misleading title, 'In Liverpool Ships Went the African Slaves', less than a quarter of this article discussed the slave trade, with focus again falling on Roscoe. 'In 1807', the author proclaimed, 'no more fitting representative of Liverpool in its sixth centenary year could be found than William Roscoe.'<sup>92</sup> The article also discussed Roscoe's poem *Mount Pleasant*, which 'attacked the slave trade in no uncertain terms, although this was considered essential for Liverpool's prosperity', and repeated this idea later through emphasis of the dependence of the city on the slave trade.<sup>93</sup> Sydney Jeffery similarly described William Roscoe as 'the great anti-slaver,

of Parliament for Liverpool', George Chandler, 'Towards the new industrial city,' *City Charter Supplement, Liverpool Daily Post*, 17 June 1957, 5. 'William Roscoe voted successfully, during his brief period as Member of Parliament for the abolition of the slave trade' George Chandler, 'Dates that made Liverpool,' *Charter Programme (supplement), Liverpool Daily Echo*, 17 June 1957, 11. George Chandler, 'William Roscoe and the Abolition of the Slave Trade,' *Liverpool Daily Echo*, 3 July 1957.

90 Chandler, 'William Roscoe and the Abolition of the Slave Trade.' This is presumably a 'paradox' because an MP from Liverpool, a town heavily involved in the slave trade, voted for its abolition.

91 See R. Eyerman, 'The Past in the Present,' 162.

92 'In Liverpool ships went the African slaves and apprenticed white children who were to play an unhappy but significant part in – Opening up the New World,' *Liverpool Daily Echo*, 2 July 1957. Although no author is acknowledged on this article, it seems highly probable that this piece was either written by Chandler or heavily influenced by his writings. The section morally justifying the slave trade states: 'This was not due to any particular moral failing in her merchants, but to worldwide economic forces which Liverpool was well fitted to serve', a line that appears in a similar form within Chandler's *Liverpool*: 'Liverpool's supremacy in the slave trade was not, therefore, due to any distinctive moral failing in her merchants, but to worldwide economic needs, which she did not create' (305–06). It is interesting that an additional note is made of Liverpool's suitability for fulfilling these global needs.

93 'In spite of Liverpool's economic dependence on the slave trade, Roscoe was firmly convinced that it was wrong to deny others the liberty which Englishmen had acquired for themselves. He also knew at first hand the demoralising effect of the trade on some of those who were forced to take part in it.' 'In Liverpool ships...'

the Morning-Star of Liverpool's reformation'.<sup>94</sup> Within a similar celebration of 'Men Who Made Liverpool Famous' in the *Liverpool Evening Express's* charter supplement, William Roscoe was described as '[o]ne of the greatest Liverpolitans' who 'achieved fame as a poet, historian, political pamphleteer, opponent of the slave trade and fighter for freedom and equality'.<sup>95</sup> William Roscoe had, by 1957, become a clear emblem of citizen-heroic pride for Liverpool, wheeled out at moments of public commemorative and celebratory activity as the abolition counter-argument for the city's intense history of transatlantic slave trading.<sup>96</sup>

Abolitionism had become a solid reference point within Roscoe's abbreviated memories on plaques and guides addressing places of memory in Liverpool in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Within close vicinity to Roscoe Gardens are the Roscoe Head pub on Roscoe Street and Roscoe Arms on Renshaw Street, both of which, according to a 2004 guide (published just after the 250th anniversary of Roscoe's birth), 'are named after William Roscoe, writer, anti-slavery campaigner, and cultural giant'.<sup>97</sup> A black plaque was later erected on the memorial in Roscoe Gardens as part of a scheme to replace the 'blue-plaque style' colour coded system previously run by the Liverpool Heritage Bureau (city council) after 2005.<sup>98</sup> The plaque, placed after the 250th anniversary of Roscoe's birth in 2003, and in the year plans for the new ISM were announced, centralized Roscoe's 'abolitionist' identity neatly and succinctly, memorializing him simply as 'William Roscoe MP / Solicitor & Slavery Abolitionist / "Greatest of Liverpool's Citizens"' (see Figure 4).

Roscoe's memory has been deployed frequently as a counter-argument to the city's historic role in the transatlantic slave trade, phrased in ways which seemingly seek to mitigate this involvement; yes, Liverpool was involved in slavery, *but* Liverpool also produced Roscoe, who helped abolish the trade. In 2008, the year of Liverpool's European Capital of Culture title, a year after its 800th birthday and the bicentenary of 1807, Andrew Pearce of the Liverpool

94 Sydney Jeffery, 'The Making of the City,' *City Charter Supplement*, 6.

95 'The Men Who Made Liverpool Famous,' *City of Liverpool Charter Celebrations 1207-1957: Evening Express Charter Supplement*, 17 June 1957.

96 In an article marking the publication of a book concerning Liverpool's mansions (and the activities of their owners), journalist Arnold Edmondson queries the 'stigma Liverpool incurred by its part in the [slave] trade,' whilst suggesting that her citizens 'have the consolation that notable Liverpool men were active in opposition to it.' Arnold Edmondson, 'The Great Houses of Liverpool,' *Liverpool Daily Echo*, 17 June 1957.

97 David Lewis, *Walks Through History: Liverpool* (Liverpool: Breedon Books Publishing, 2004), 168.

98 Frankie Roberto and Carl Winstanley (Liverpool City Council), Freedom of Information Act Requested by Frankie Roberto, 26 February 2009, [www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/blue\\_plaque\\_scheme\\_2](http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/blue_plaque_scheme_2) (accessed 24 March 2014).



4 Roscoe Gardens Memorial Plaque, 2003 (Photograph: Author)

Heritage Forum criticized a booklet published by English Heritage (written by local historian and *Echo* columnist Laurence Westgaph) about streets named in connection to slavery, in the Forum's newsletter.<sup>99</sup> The piece questioned whether 'this wish to make the city's history better known will extend to streets named after former citizens who made positive achievements such as William Roscoe, who played a leading part in abolishing the slave trade'.<sup>100</sup> In

<sup>99</sup> Laurence Westgaph, *Read the Signs: Street Names With a Connection to the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Abolition* (Liverpool: English Heritage and Liverpool City Council, 2007); Laurence Westgaph, 'On Friday at the Big History Show I launched my new pamphlet entitled "Read the Signs",' *Liverpool Echo*, 17 September 2007.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew Pearce (ed.), *Liverpool Heritage Forum Newsletter*, 45, 21 May 2008. The newsletter of the previous month had also included a long section on Roscoe's life and work alongside reporting on the Roscoe Lecture series. The lecture in 2007 was given

fact, Roscoe did appear in this booklet, with an entire page discussing street names, memorials, and buildings connected to or named after him.<sup>101</sup> Roscoe's name is here readily drawn upon to 'counter' associations between Liverpool and slavery, to act as a 'positive' and thereby morally balancing historical figure, better referenced perhaps than other 'negative' aspects of Liverpool's past; '[w]hat other city' asks Pearce, 'focuses mainly on the downside of its history?'<sup>102</sup> William Roscoe was also used by Pearce as a figure of contention within criticisms of the ISM. Pearce, who was at this time the Chair of the Friends of National Museums Liverpool, stated that the Friends were withholding funds from the ISM for its 'unbalanced' history, and in particular criticized the museum for not celebrating abolition enough, particularly the work of William Roscoe.<sup>103</sup> In broader discourse around the disbanding of the Friends group the following year (see Chapter 5), the apparent lack of acknowledgement of Roscoe and abolition within the museum was presented alongside a perceived lack of acknowledgement of African complicity, that only 'very small space' was dedicated to abolitionists 'including William Roscoe' and that '[t]he Liverpool abolitionists tried their best.'<sup>104</sup>

### Conclusion

Processes of reframing Roscoe's character and credentials have followed the ebb and flow of time and sensibilities. Across centenaries and bicentenaries of life, death, and emancipation, his anti-slavery sentiments, once a dissonant piece of Roscoe's memory puzzle in the early nineteenth century, are foregrounded to elevate his position as Liverpool's great abolitionist-martyr-hero in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The role of anniversaries and round-number commemorative events have been paramount to this

by Lord Alton, who presented a biography of William Roscoe. '200 years earlier' the newsletter states, 'an Act of Parliament which abolished the slave trade throughout the British Empire was passed. Roscoe, one of Liverpool's MPs, played a major part in this.' Later in the article, the author questions whether 'the authorities in Liverpool concentrate too much on the evils of the slave trade and not enough on the role that some of the city's citizens, Roscoe in particular, took to stamp it out?' Andrew Pearce (ed.), *Liverpool Heritage Forum Newsletter*, 42, 14 April 2008.

101 A point made by Westgaph in response to the *Liverpool Heritage Forum Newsletter* piece. Laurence Westgaph, 'Why We Can't Ignore Our City's Shameful Past,' *Liverpool Echo*, 27 May 2008.

102 Pearce, *Liverpool Heritage Forum Newsletter*, 45.

103 David Bartlett, 'Museum Friends group disbanded in city row,' *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28 April 2008.

104 Peter and Caro Urquart, 'Letter: No explanation,' *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28 January 2009.

process. They have forged moments of succeeding chronological markers following his death, acting to focus public attention around the perception and construction of a particular version of 'Roscoe' at different points in time, awkwardly contesting the place, significance, and even mention of his euphemistically referenced 'politics' – the anti-slavery strand of his identity. Initially a point of intense public debate, the feature of divisions over his ill-fated memorialization in the 1830s and 1840s, 'Roscoe the abolitionist' is nonetheless resurrected across the later nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century reflecting a context of a progressively 'anti-slavery' British Empire. Such commemorative reframing owes more to contemporary anxiety than it does to happenstance. Whilst Liverpool's rival regional port city of empire, Bristol, was busy fashioning a memorial cult out of seventeenth-century merchant businessman, philanthropist, and, notably, slave-trader, Edward Colston (1636–1721), Victorian Liverpool chose one of her few abolitionists.<sup>105</sup> Whilst Roscoe's favourable selection owed a great debt to his cultural credentials, the greater public and civic awareness of the city as the former 'slaving capital of the world', no doubt also influenced this choice.

Roscoe's memorial reframing as 'abolitionist', and in particular his presentation as local counterpart to national figure William Wilberforce, was further shaped by commemorative anniversary memory-work during the 1930s. John Oldfield has argued that the coincidence of the centenary of the Emancipation Act with the centenary of the death of William Wilberforce came to commemoratively combine the two – Wilberforce the hero of emancipation, the ultimate Christian martyr-hero, who saw the Bill pass before his dying eyes, became synonymous with emancipation itself. The prolonged public exposure to emancipation during the run up to 1933 and 1934 and its after-effects foregrounded individual 'civic' abolitionists as 'local' patriots and heroes, which acted upon a 'national' stage. This was the national endorsement that enabled Roscoe's memory to be shaped more solidly into an abolitionist mould, used and drawn upon more fervently in the birthday celebrations of 1957 than those of 1907. Memorialized across various genres in Liverpool, in road names, pub names, statues, memorials, plaques, commemorative lectures, and of course within inscribed texts, Roscoe's associations with abolition have become accepted, without need for qualification, and in equal measure to one of his professional occupations: 'solicitor and slavery abolitionist' is now his epitaph.

105 Dresser, *Slavery Obscured*, 23. Christine Chivallon, 'Bristol and the Eruption of Memory: Making the Slave-Trading Past Visible,' *Social & Cultural Geography* 2:3 (2001).

