



William: Hello and welcome to Weekender – I’m William Kremer. Let’s start by going back to 1807. At that time, Britain was an extremely powerful country with a large empire. Britain made its money through trading with other countries – through selling them materials and products. One area that made a great deal of money was the slave trade.

Slaves are people who are owned by other people - they have no freedom. During the years of the slave trade, the British bought slaves, often from African leaders, then transported them by ship to America and other places to sell. Slaves either died on the journey or faced a life of hard work, bad treatment and disease.

This awful practice had existed for hundreds of years before 1807 – and slavery didn’t stop in 1807. Indeed, there are still slaves today. But in that year, the British government made it illegal. It stopped the slave trade, or, we would normally say, it ‘abolished’ the slave trade. ‘To abolish’ means to stop something by law and there’s a noun form too – ‘abolition’.

But as we’ll find out, the British had a mixture of reasons for abolishing the slave trade. Let’s hear now from the historian and politician William Hague. In this clip, he mentions the power Britain had after Trafalgar. Trafalgar was an important sea battle that the British Royal Navy won against France in 1805. But what does William Hague say was ‘part of the abolition of the slave trade’?

W. Hague: The Royal Navy, after Trafalgar, had the power to enforce the abolition of the slave trade and to stop other countries doing it. And so part of the abolition of the slave trade was won by self-interest.

William: Listen again. What was part of the abolition of the slave trade?

W. Hague: The Royal Navy, after Trafalgar, had the power to enforce the abolition of the slave trade and to stop other countries doing it. And so part of the abolition of the slave trade was won by self-interest.

William: William Hague says that after the Battle of Trafalgar, Britain had enough power to stop other countries trading slaves. So one reason the British agreed to abolish the trade was that they knew they could stop other countries making money through the slave trade too.

W. Hague: And so part of the abolition of the slave trade was won by self-interest during.

William: 'Interest' is one of those words with several very different meanings. 'Self-interest', a noun, doesn't mean interest in or curiosity about yourself. If you do something 'out of self-interest' you do it because it will help you and not anyone else. For example, someone might ask: 'Did he become a doctor because he wanted to help people?' and you might reply, 'No. He just wanted the salary - he did it out of self-interest.'

William Hague is saying that although abolishing the slave trade was a good thing, it partly occurred because of the British parliament's self-interest.

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William: But was there more to the abolition than self-interest? Here's William Hague again:

W.Hague: It still required, in the end, the British parliament to have its fit of philanthropy. It still required them to take an altruistic action, to go beyond self-interest and to say 'We are abolishing this for good and for ourselves'.

William: He said that to abolish the slave trade the British parliament had to 'go beyond self-interest' which means they had to think about more than their own needs and desires. He uses an interesting adjective to describe an action which 'goes beyond self-interest'. Listen again:

W.Hague: It still required, in the end, the British parliament to have its fit of philanthropy. It still required them to take an altruistic action, to go beyond self-interest and to say 'We are abolishing this for good and for ourselves'.

William: An 'altruistic' action is an action which brings no benefit to you – you just do it to help other people. For example, someone might ask, 'Did he become a doctor to help people?' And you might say, 'Yes, he did. He doesn't care about the salary. He's a very altruistic person.' There's a noun form too – altruism.

W.Hague: It still required, in the end, the British parliament to have its fit of philanthropy.

William: 'Philanthropy' is a concern for other people's health and happiness. We often use this word to describe things that rich people or organisations do to help the poor. For example, Bill Gates is a successful businessman who devotes a lot of time and money to charity work, so you could say 'Bill Gates is famous for his philanthropy'.

William Hague used the expression 'a fit of philanthropy'. This implies that the abolition of the slave trade was sudden and unusual. British politics at that time was of course very self-interested, and acts of altruism were rare!

If you have some spare time this weekend, why not find out a bit more about the slave trade and the abolition by following the links on the Weekender webpage? It's good practice for your English and I promise you it's very interesting!