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Preface to Slavery in Yorkshire: Richard Oastler and the campaign against child labour in the Industrial Revolution

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Preface



TIM THORNTON, UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

IN RESPONDING TO the bicentenary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, this collection of essays and the conference in 2007 from which it springs have helped to remind us of important resonances of that momentous legislation. Centrally, the book provides a rounded evaluation of the contribution of Richard Oastler to the broader movement for emancipation. This is conceived without geographical or cultural barriers, as a way in which some in the nineteenth century responded both to slavery as then conventionally defined and to the situation, especially for children and women, amongst those working in the newly emerged industries of Britain in that period.

It was a particular privilege to be able to host the conference and to support publication at the University of Huddersfield, an institution where those resonances were and are particularly strong: in a town which Oastler knew so well and where he was so enthusiastically hailed as 'Factory King', and in a university which incorporates a training college formerly known as Oastler College in his honour. It was striking that the conference brought together a large and enthusiastic audience and one which approached Oastler from many different perspectives, reflective of his meanings in the contemporary world. I am confident that this book will have a similarly broad appeal. It is also appropriate that the university is an international community of scholars and students, reflecting the global implications for Oastler's



message, whether in the nineteenth century or now in the twenty-first. Oastler's memory and that of the cause for which he stood have been strong in this area, and the conference and book stand as an excellent testimony to the role of rigorous scholarship in reviving and renewing our understanding of that memory and its relevance to contemporary issues in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, and around the world.

The interconnectedness of the economies and cultures of slavery on both sides of the Atlantic; the importance of religious faith, and especially of Wesleyan Methodism and of New Connexion Methodism, in shaping responses to human exploitation; the dynamics of the factory movement, especially in Huddersfield itself; the mechanisms of the campaign Oastler waged, whether in the press or in his personal appearances; and the character of the man himself – our understanding of all these aspects is enhanced in this excellent book.

TIM THORNTON STUDIED at New College, Oxford. In 1997 he was awarded the Royal Historical Society's David Berry Prize for his work on the Isle of Man; in 1999 he was *proxime accessit* for the Society's Alexander Prize for an essay on the palatinate of Durham. He was the first scholar based in a new University to win one of the Society's prizes. Tim works on the late medieval and early modern political and social history of the British Isles, spanning the period c. 1400–1650, and his many books and papers include *Cheshire and the Tudor State, 1480–1560* (2000), *The Charters of Guernsey* (2004), and *Prophecy, Politics and the People in Early Modern England* (2006); his monograph on *The Channel Islands, 1370–1640: Between England and Normandy* is due for publication in 2012.

Appointed Head of the Department of History, English, Languages and Media at the University of Huddersfield in 2003, Tim was on secondment as Head of University Centre Barnsley during 2005–6 and became Dean of the School of Music, Humanities and Media in October 2006. He was appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) at the University in October 2008.