

What does William Wilberforce and the excellent GCSE citizenship pupils at Aylesford Secondary School have in common? Well it might sound tenuous but over 200 years apart both presented their views on the abhorrence of slavery and called for MPs to act.

I only have two real heroes and one is William Wilberforce. It took him over 30 years to get the Slave Trade Act passed and yet today, two centuries on, slavery still exists.

The youngsters at Aylesford School presented me with a project on slave labour in Africa and it is hard to not sympathise with their findings. It is more difficult however to come up with solutions when trying to resolve moral issues like this in another jurisdiction. Yet what is more shocking is that slavery still exists here in the UK and it is largely ignored, as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Last week I visited one of the most dramatic and distressing exhibitions ever promoted in the House of Commons highlighting the hidden nature of Modern Day Slavery. No one knows the real numbers involved. Yet, the Serious Organised Crime Agency knows that at least 2,000 victims are found each year. However, they believe that is the tip of the iceberg and that for every victim found, another ten remain hidden. The Human Trafficking Foundation concludes there must be up to 20,000 slaves in the cities, towns and villages of the UK. Most shockingly, of these victims that have come to light, 49.5% are known to have come from the South East.

Modern day slavery comes in many forms and while it was good to see pupils with an awareness of slavery, now we have to recognise that it is not just in Africa but here on these shores. However unlike William Wilberforce it must not take decades to deal with it.