

THE THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON MEMORIAL SERVICE 2021

INTRODUCTION BY REV EDWARD TILDELSEY

In this 450th year of celebrating the founding of the borough of Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, it is befitting that we also take time to add to those celebrations in honouring Thomas Fowell Buxton, one of Weymouth's most famous and nationally recognised MPs, representing the Borough in Parliament for 19 years.

Buxton was a tireless mover-and shaker in the dismantling of organised enslavement before his time. He was also more than this. People who put themselves out this generously for causes to which they hold dear, and which others may be hostile towards, leave behind them a legacy; a cultural legacy.

It was because of people like Thomas Fowell Buxton that the British government later went on to lead the world, at enormous financial and life-cost, in a further process of liberation; one in which other nations were to follow. Britain led with arguably the greatest effect.

So, if you're feeling patriotic about being British, this cultural heritage is surely one to celebrate and be thankful for.

In short, TFB not only made Britain a better, more humane and compassionate place than it was before. The world he left behind him was better than the one he had stepped in to.

We ponder at this memorial in this time, when kindness can so easily be overtaken by suspicion and fear brought about by the pandemic, that we, too, have the capacity to leave our world in a better or worse state than when we set foot in it.

And that requires an intentional decision and resolve; one from which none of us can escape: slavery remains a billion-pound evil, even in our so-called enlightened time – more covert, subtle and insidious than ever. The door remains wide open, friends, for our choice to leave the world either a better or worse place than we found and find it.

As we remember this giant of history, we may also give thanks for all who, according to their passions and principles, stand up now to be counted in leaving the world – the planet – in a better state than when they found it in. There is no doubt that, had he been alive in our time, Thomas Fowell Buxton would have been unashamedly using his public office to name and push against the evils and injustices we all know about.

I invite us each to ask: "What is mine to do now, in our time, inspired by the courage and humanity of Thomas Fowell Buxton; facts raised in our public awareness by the research and commitment of those who give much energy to this part of our local history?"