

Elizabeth Heyrick (1769 – 1831)

Elizabeth Heyrick had become widowed at the age of 26. She was passionate in her hatred of injustice. So it is perhaps not surprising that she took up the anti-slavery cause. She was a leading light in women's anti-slavery societies in the 1820s and set up the Female Society for Leicester.

Whereas the men leading the anti-slavery campaign talked about the 'gradual' freeing of the slaves, Elizabeth wanted complete freedom immediately. Other female societies supported her. Elizabeth was a blast of fresh air to the movement.

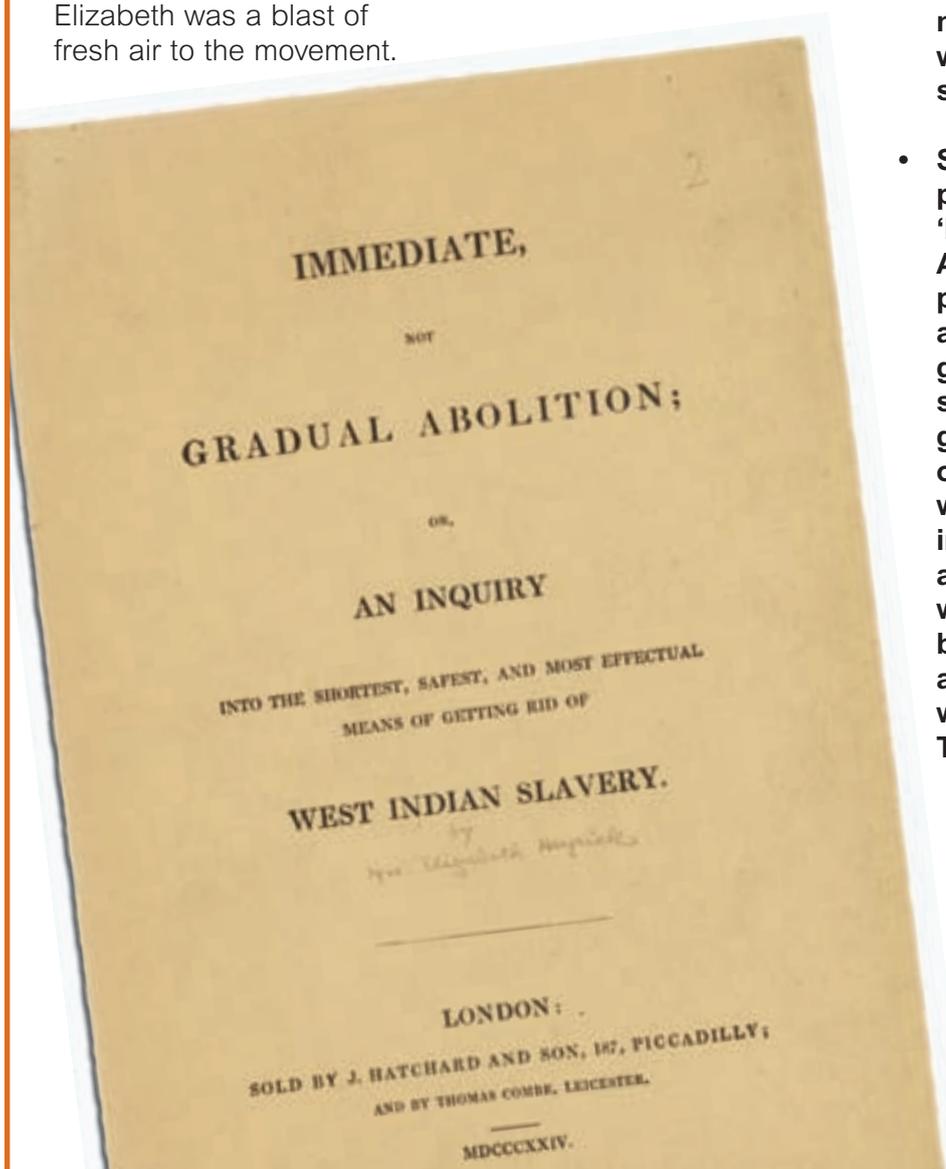
She condemned the campaign leaders as too polite and cautious. She said: 'Truth and justice make their best way in the world, when they appear in bold and simple majesty.'

She openly sympathised with the slave rebellions in the West Indies which she regarded as a form of self-defence. Unfortunately Elizabeth died in 1831 and did not live to see the passing of the 1833 Act abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire.

Campaigning

Elizabeth was a ferocious campaigner. She liked direct tactics and straight speaking:

- **She was a key figure in the organisation of a new sugar boycott (repeating the one of the 1790s) which was designed to hit plantation owners hard. She inspired the women's societies to put out pamphlets encouraging the boycott and established a national list of everyone who stopped using sugar.**
- **She wrote an influential pamphlet in 1824 called 'Immediate not Gradual Abolition'. She put pressure on Wilberforce and other leaders by getting all the female societies to refuse to give funds to the main organisation if they would not support immediate freedom for all enslaved people. This was a serious threat because about a fifth of all donations came from women's associations. The men gave in.**



Samuel J. May Anti-Slavery Collection, Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.