

# Thomas Clarkson

Information taken from: The Abolition Project <http://abolition.e2bn.org/box.html>

Thomas Clarkson is a local hero. A red haired man who stood over 6 feet tall, he spent his long adult life working to abolish the Transatlantic Slave Trade and slavery itself. Born in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire in 1760, the eldest of 3 children of the local headmaster and minister, he studied at the local grammar school and then St John's College, Cambridge. From 1786, he lived and worked in London, in the Lake District and then moved, with his wife Catherine, to Bury St Edmunds in 1803. Finally, in 1816, he came to Playford Hall near Ipswich, where he died in 1846, aged 86. He was buried at Playford Church. (for details of Clarksons life - see below).

## **Thomas Clarkson's Box**

In an effort to gather hard facts about the Slave Trade, Thomas Clarkson visited many ports and went aboard the trading vessels. One of the first African trading ships Clarkson visited was called the 'Lively'. It was not a slave ship but its cargo had a powerful impact upon Clarkson. The ship was full of beautiful and exotic goods:- carved ivory and woven cloth, along with produce such as beeswax, palm oil and peppers. Clarkson could see the craftsmanship and skill that would have been required to produce many of the items. The idea that their creators could be enslaved was horrifying. Clarkson bought samples from the ship and started a collection that he added to over the years. The collection included crops and spices and raw materials, along with the intricate goods produced with them, and was kept in a large box.

Thomas Clarkson noticed how pictures and artifacts were able to influence public opinion, more than mere words alone, and quickly realised that the contents of the chest might reinforce the message of his anti-slavery lectures. He used the contents to demonstrate the skill of Africans and the possibilities that existed for an alternative humane trading system. The 'box' became an important part his public meetings, providing an early example of a visual aid.

## **Document:**

Go to this link to view your document: <http://museumbox.e2bn.org/creator/viewer/show/34>