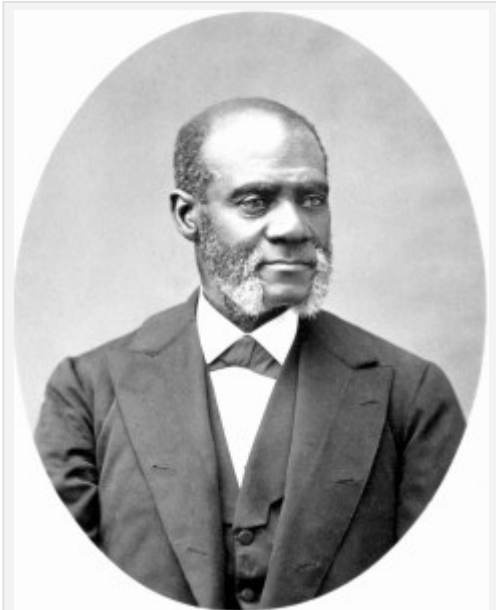


The Anti-Slavery movement in North Hertfordshire



Henry Highland Garnet (1815-1882), an escaped slave who visited Hitchin in the early 1850s



Illustration from *The Black Man's Lament* by Amelia Opie, 1826

Hitchin has a long history of its residents standing up against slavery. This is partly because of the unusually large number of Quakers in the town, as Quakers have long campaigned against injustice, and especially slavery. The townspeople formed an early Anti-Slavery Society, and there is evidence for black people here by 1840. Hitchin was not the only place where people were concerned about the injustice of slavery, with the Royston lawyer Joseph Beldam giving his services to the movement.

From this research, it seems that many people in what is now North Hertfordshire were angered by slavery in the West Indies and also in Africa, and lobbied for change both locally and in Parliament. Local non-conformists like Baptists and Congregationalists also favoured ending the slave trade, but unlike the Quakers seem to have been more concerned with the missionary aspects of abolition, and the possibilities of converting freed slaves to Christianity. This essay has just scratched the surface of the subject; there is still much to discover about the anti-slavery movement in North Herts, and more particularly about our Victorian black and Asian inhabitants.

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