

Number 62 Fleet Street

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From: Tallis's London Street Views. No. 15, Fleet Street, 1838

If you had been standing two hundred years ago on what is now the pavement at the west side of Bouverie Street where it joins Fleet Street, you would not have been in the open air as you are today. Instead, you would have been in the printing office of Richard Carlile at number 62 Fleet Street, the building to the right above.

The printing office and the building above it was pulled down around 1850 in order to widen the entrance to Bouverie Street, which at that time was only 8 ft wide. The ground floor was a shop for selling "The Republican" and other radical publications, such as the works of Thomas Paine. It might also have had the heavy printing press in it. The first floor would have probably been for the compositor picking out the metal type to make the words to be printed, and putting them into formes for printing. Finishing work on books would probably have been done here too. One or both of the two upper floors would have been the family living quarters.

The printing office was run by Richard Carlile, and he had founded his newspaper, called "The Republican" in 1817. He was a radical, who thought that big changes were needed in society. He thought it was unjust that only people who owned property could vote in

elections. And he thought that women should be allowed to own property, to vote and to stand for Parliament. These things are now part of the law of England, and everybody accepts them. But at that time, they were not, and the people in power did not think that these ideas should be publicly expressed.

So the authorities tried to stop his newspaper. They started by putting a tax on newspapers. "The Republican" sold for one penny, and the tax was four pence a copy, so the price of "The Republican" had to go up to five pence in order to pay the tax. This meant that many people who had started buying it could no longer do so. The Government hoped that the newspaper would close down, but it didn't. People started sharing copies and passing it round.

So Richard Carlile was prosecuted for "seditious libel" which meant that he had criticised the Church of England, and the system of tithes, a tax on property paid to the Church. He was found guilty and sent to prison several times.

It is thanks to the courage of people such as Richard Carlile that we owe the freedom of the press, and our own personal freedom of expression, which nowadays we tend to take for granted. But we would not have it if they had not fought and died for it.



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Additional notes

Source: Land Registry title plans, Museum of London, documents on Richard Carlile

Prepared by: PN, 2021

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Additional notes: If you think something important has been left out, please tell us by email)