VICTOR/AN BLOGGING
Victorian Blogging
the Pamphleteers who Dared to
Dream of a Better World
Conway Hall is unique. The oldest surviving freethought organisation in the world. The only surviving ethical society in the United Kingdom. The longest running chamber music series in the world. The only library in the United Kingdom dedicated solely to humanist material. The list goes on. The iconic names associated with the society across the centuries are myriad, diverse and extraordinary.

Nurturing the community locally, nationally and internationally, our work spans politics, art, music, science, ethics, philosophy, literature. Conway Hall is a place where history and friends are made, a home for dreamers and freethinkers.

Since 1886, Conway Hall Humanist Library and Archives has been a haven for those radicals, political and social reformers and freethinkers who dared to dream of a better world. The first incarnation of the library at the Society’s then home, South Place Chapel, Islington, appeared at a time when public lending libraries were scarce, and self-education was being promoted. Members of the Society proposed that a library be instated, and the first donations were requested from the membership. Beginning as a general lending library offering a wide-ranging collection of diverse subjects to suit the needs of the membership, the library has since evolved and grown to become the country’s only specialist humanist library. Along the way we have acquired the library of the Rationalist Press Association, the Stanton Coit Library, and the National Secular Society’s Library and Archives.

A notable area of our collection is the trove of nineteenth-century pamphlets we house. These invaluable, fragile ephemera provide a record of the enlightened individuals, organisations and movements of nineteenth-century Britain, the political and social causes they championed and the ideals they held. Victorian radicals used the cheap and rapidly disseminated medium of the pamphlet to express their ideas on such manifold issues as Church and secular matters, parliamentary reform, blasphemy laws, freedom of the press, women’s rights, suffrage, the Corn Laws, birth control, secularism, socialism and vegetarianism (to name but a few). Many of the issues addressed remain highly relevant today and one of the aims of this pack is to help to explore the parallels between nineteenth-century pamphleteering and twenty-first-century blogging, encouraging people to re-engage with these still topical concerns.

This learning pack has been created as part of our Heritage Lottery-funded project, Victorian Blogging: The Apologist Who Dared to Dream of a Better World. I hope you will be as inspired reading it as we have been researching it.

Sophie Hawkey-Edwards
Library and Learning Manager, Conway Hall
SOPHIE HAWKEY-EDWARDS
LIBRARY AND LEARNING MANAGER, CONWAY HALL
‘Every valuable human being must be a radical and a rebel, for what he must aim at is to make things better than they are.’—Niels Bohr
Sophie is a qualified librarian with over fifteen years’ experience in library, information and creative roles, including managing a portfolio of creative learning opportunities for West Dunbartonshire Council. Her current role involves managing Conway Hall’s Library & Archives and learning programme, including family activities, volunteer opportunities, adult education courses and related projects.

ALICIA CHILCOTT
DIGITISATION COORDINATOR, CONWAY HALL
‘Words are our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable of both inflicting injury, and remediating it.’—J. K. Rowling
Alicia has been Digitisation Coordinator at Conway Hall since 2017, overseeing the Victorian Bloggers digitisation project. She previously worked at Glasgow University Archive Services and the Marks & Spencer Company Archive and has completed a Master’s in Archives and Records Management.

OLWEN TERRIS
LIBRARY CATALOGUER, CONWAY HALL
‘The moment you declare a set of ideas to be immune from criticism, satire, derision or contempt, freedom of thought becomes impossible.’—Salman Rushdie
Olwen worked at the British Film Institute, National Film and Television Archive in the role of Chief Cataloguer for thirteen years before moving to the Imperial War Museum, Department of Collections Management as Data Standards Officer. She has been at Conway Hall since 2012, when she started as a volunteer cataloguer and has catalogued the library’s nineteenth century pamphlet collection.

TOM SANDERSON
ACTING DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM
‘Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed; everything else is public relations.’—George Orwell (attrib.)
Tom Sanderson is Acting Director at the Centre for Investigative Journalism, an educational charity that specialises providing training to journalists, researchers, producers and students in the practice and methodology of investigative journalism. For the past two years, Tom has been running projects across the UK aimed at increasing the capacity of community-led news outlets to conduct public-interest investigations.

Research and contextual material for this learning pack have been produced by the Conway Hall Library team in partnership with the Centre for Investigative Journalism:
This resource aims to give students and interested readers a greater understanding of the people, organisations and movements who have fought and indeed remain fighting for a fairer and more equal world.

The first chapter introduces some of the key nineteenth-century pamphleteers who campaigned for such rights as freedom of the press, women’s rights, abolition of slavery, suffrage and political and social reform.

Comparisons will then be made to contemporary bloggers and citizen journalists who continue this campaigning tradition utilising social media and other online avenues to raise social and political issues, gain support and agitate for change.

This resource contains lesson, workshop and activity ideas to help further exploration of the people and topics discussed, a glossary of terms, bibliography, biographies of key nineteenth-century radicals and links to helpful websites.

This is an adaptable pack, that can be used as a stand-alone resource or in conjunction with other activities and resources:

- A tour and talk from the Conway Hall Library team
- Online resources such as bibliographies, blog posts and articles, available from: HTTPS://CONWAYHALL.ORG.UK/LEARNING-AT-CONWAYHALL-PROJECTS/VICTORIAN-BLOGGING-PAMPHLETES-DARED-DRAM-BETTER-WORLD/
- Digitised pamphlets, available at: HTTPS://CONWAYHALLCOLLECTIONS.OMERSA.NET
- Pop-up exhibition banners
In Germany, Goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg invents the printing press. His invention of hand-molded metal printing matrices make possible the precise and rapid creation of metal movable type in large quantities.

1712 Stamp Act introduced as a tax on the publication of newspapers and pamphlets. This has a chilling effect on publishers, and is blamed for the decline of English literature critical of the government during the period of the act.

Thomas Paine publishes *Common Sense*. It advocates independence from Great Britain to the people of the Thirteen Colonies. Published anonymously, it comes an immediate sensation, read aloud at taverns and public meeting places.

Journals, the Fourth Estate, are first admitted to the House of Commons. *Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all.* T. Carlyle

Thomas Paine publishes *Rights of Man*, subtitled *Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution*. It posits that popular political revolution is permissible when a government does not safeguard the natural rights of its people.

Thomas Paine publishes the first part of *The Age of Reason*, subtitled *Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology*. It challenges institutionalised religion and the legitimacy of the Bible. It is a bestseller in America, less welcomed in England.

Steam-powered rotary printing press devised by German Friedrich König in collaboration with watchmaker Andreas Friedrich Bauer. It can print up to 1,100 sheets per hour, printing on both sides of the paper simultaneously.

Parliament passes the first of the Corn Laws. These enhance the profits and political power associated with land ownership, raising food prices and the costs of living for the British public, whilst hampering growth in other sectors.
Richard Carlile establishes his radical printing press on Fleet Street, London. Though no longer the home of the Fourth Estate, to this day Fleet Street remains a metonym for the British national press.

The Peterloo Massacre occurs at St Peter’s Field, Manchester when the cavalry charges a crowd demanding reform; Richard Carlile starts his radical journal, The Republican, and is imprisoned for publishing the works of Thomas Paine. Jane Carlile, publisher of The Republican in her husband’s absence is imprisoned for two years. Richard Carlile has continued to write articles from his prison cell, and due to the publicity The Republican is outselling The Times.

Mary-Anne Carlile is imprisoned for publishing The Republican in place of her brother and sister-in-law. Eight of the Carlile’s shop workers, and over one hundred and fifty men and women will be sent to prison for selling The Republican. Pamphlet duty is repealed.

The 4d tax on newspapers is reduced to 1d.

Advertisement duty is repealed.

Parliament passes the Contagious Diseases Acts. The legislation allows police officers to arrest women suspected of being prostitutes in certain ports and army towns. Suspects are subjected to compulsory checks for venereal disease.

Paper duty is finally repealed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Gladstone, but only after a false start in 1860, when the House of Lords rejects his bill, against conventions on financial issues. It passes as part of the budget.

Charles Watts and Charles Bradlaugh co-found the National Secular Society. There are a number of secularist groups around the UK and they join up to coordinate and strengthen their campaigns.

Annie Besant delivers her first public lecture, The Political Status of Women, in the Cooperative Hall, Castle Street. She is a brilliant orator and is soon travelling the country, speaking on all the most important issues of the day.
London dock strike breaks out in the Port of London. It results in victory for the strikers, and is considered a milestone in the development of the British Labour movement. The strike helps draw attention to the problems of poverty.

Representation of the People Act 1918 is passed. Sometimes known as the Fourth Reform Act, the Act extends the right to vote to men aged twenty-one and over, and to women aged thirty subject to their meeting certain conditions.

Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928 is passed. This act expands on the Representation of the People Act 1918, widening suffrage by giving women over twenty-one electoral equality with men.

The World Wide Web is invented by Tim Berners-Lee. Central to the development of the Information Age it becomes the tool billions use to interact on the Internet; The United Nations adopts the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The United Nations adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris. The Declaration is the first step in the process of formulating the International Bill of Human Rights, which will be completed in 1966.

The World Wide Web is invented by Tim Berners-Lee. Central to the development of the Information Age it becomes the tool billions use to interact on the Internet; The United Nations adopts the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

C.E.R.N. makes the World Wide Web open-source, placing it in the public domain and allowing widespread free use of the technology. The milestone of one billion websites is reached in September 2014, with more pages added daily.
The #MeToo movement begins, a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault. #MeToo spreads virally on social media in an attempt to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace.

The Occupy movement, a progressive, socio-political movement against social and economic inequality begins in Wall Street, New York, triggering occupations throughout the World using social media and #Occupy to organise and share.

The #BlackLivesMatter movement begins, an international activist movement, originating in the African-American community, that campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards black people following a number of high profile trials.

The Arab Spring uprisings in response to oppressive regimes and low standards of living begin, harnessing social media to organise protestors and inform the world about what is happening as the protests spread from their origins in Tunisia.

The World Press Freedom Index begins, intended as an annual compilation published by Reporters Without Borders based upon the organisation’s own assessment of a countries’ press freedom records over the previous year.

Laws come into effect that abolish the common law offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel in England and Wales. Contrary to the principles of free speech, the old blasphemy laws probably also run counter to human rights laws.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 is passed. Public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities and members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.
Pamphlet, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary is, ‘a small booklet or leaflet containing information or arguments about a single subject.’

Forgotten at the back of dusty desk drawers, hidden in crumbling box files on library shelves, the pamphlets disguise is of something unimportant, ephemeral and of little consequence. However, their flimsy pages and the words they contain have proved to be quite the opposite – the catalyst to igniting revolutions, overthrowing governments, and altering the course of history. Since the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth-century, pamphlets have been used for a variety of purposes – from reports of meetings and court cases to reproducing political speeches, from spreading religious messages to spreading gossip and tall stories, but their great strength lies in the weaponry of their words for political and social protest.

Where previously the political elite had been able to easily keep information from the masses, pamphlets opened access to ordinary people enabling them to begin to criticise their political and religious masters and demand involvement in the decisions that affected their daily lives. This was because pamphlets were cheap and easy to produce, which allowed people to respond quickly to events, writing, printing and disseminating information to the general populace.

Digital and social media can be seen as a continuation of this tradition, a way of reaching a large audience, mobilising new supporters to a diverse range of causes and political movements and enabling online debate. It can be seen with the Arab Spring uprisings (2010–12), a series of pro-democracy uprisings that spread over several largely Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain. It led to revolutionary demonstrations and protests in North Africa and the Middle East where Twitter and Facebook were critical in organising people on the streets as to when and where to protest and in informing the rest of the world as to what was happening. As with pamphlets, this kind of digital activism often bypasses the traditional world of political and social movements. Instead, they take advantage of new, affordable technologies to provide an alternative way of organising society.

In this chapter, we will look at some of the predecessors to these online activists: nineteenth-century pioneers who used pamphlets to aid their struggles for a more equal, fairer and kinder world.
‘We have it in our power to begin the world over again.’

THOS. PAINE, 1737–1809
In 1774, after losing his job as an excise officer, Thomas Paine emigrated to America where growing unrest towards British rule fueled his revolutionary spirit. Leading him, in 1776, to write the pamphlet 'Common Sense', possibly one of the most influential pieces of writing and rhetoric in history. In it he advocated for American independence from Great Britain by arguing against the need for monarchy and in support of a democratic republic. Until that point the American Colonists, including such figures as future president General George Washington, still felt the pull of their links to Britain and the King and, despite anger at new taxes being imposed on them, there was not the passion or vision to consider what an independent America might look like.

Paine's radical belief was underlined by the radical style in which he wrote the pamphlet; by aiming it at a mass audience rather than an intellectual elite, he was able to translate complex ideas into plain language forming an impassioned vision of American independence. In it, he attacked America's veneration of the King, writing that George III was a descendant of William the Conqueror whom he scornfully described as ‘a French bastard landing with an armed banditti and establishing himself as King of England against the consent of the natives.

Designed to be read aloud in taverns and meeting houses, shared and passed on, the pamphlet became an immediate sensation, selling over 150,000 copies in its first six months and over 500,000 over the course of the American Revolution, bolstering much needed support for independence. The figures are especially impressive when you consider that America’s population at the time was only three million. As with social media today, his message to the world had gone viral!

‘I find that “Common Sense” is working a powerful change there in the minds of many men. Few pamphlets have had so dramatic an effect on political events.’ — General George Washington

On 2 July 1776, when Congress voted for American independence, Paine’s dreams of revolution were realised.

Tom Paine, son of a stay-maker from a small provincial English village, and of limited formal education, was to become one of the most important revolutionaries and political activists in history, celebrated and reviled both in his time and posthumously.
Paine returned to England in 1787 where he began work on The Rights of Man, not a pamphlet this time but a two-part book, championing the French Revolution as a new age of reason that ended the traditional elites of royalty, the aristocracy and the church. This developed into an analysis of European society and methods for remediating inequalities that were far ahead of their time such as welfare redistribution, including old age pensions, marriage allowances and maternity benefits. To put it into context the United Kingdom only introduced an old age pension in 1908 and maternity benefits in 1911, over one hundred years after Paine called for them.

Rights of Man was published in 1791 and sold nearly a million copies being, ‘eagerly read by reformers, Protestant dissenters, democrats, London craftsmen, and the skilled factory-hands of the new industrial north’ (George Rudé) and became one of the most widely read books in the Western world at the time. Whilst his ideas were popular with reformers, the establishment saw Paine as a revolutionary and charged him with treason and had government agents instigate mobs, hate meetings and the burning of his effigy to counteract the book’s rallying call for reform and equality. This resulted in a pamphlet war between Paine’s supporters and his critics. Paine escaped arrest by fleeing to France where he became passionately involved in the French Revolution and, at least to begin with, was enthusiastically received and made an honorary French citizen. In 1793 he was imprisoned in Paris for refusing to endorse the execution of Louis XVI and began to write The Age of Reason, subtitled Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology.

TO MY FELLOW-CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
I PUT the following work under your protection. It contains my opinions upon Religion. You will do me the justice to remember, that I have always strenuously supported the Right of every Man to his own opinion, however different that opinion might be to mine. He who denies to another this right, makes a slave of himself to his present opinion, because he precludes himself the right of changing it. The most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is Reason. I have never used any other, and I trust I never shall. Your affectionate friend and fellow-citizen,

THOMAS PAINE
Luxembourg, 8th Pluviose, Second Year of the French Republic, one and indivisible.
January 27, O. S. 1794.

Tom Paine’s fiercely enquiring mind had covered many themes in his pamphleteering: republicanism, politics, slavery, revolution and, with The Age of Reason, published in three parts in 1794, 1795 and 1807, he turned to organised religion, specifically Christianity. In it he challenged institutionalised religion and the stories presented by the Bible as history, questioning the inconsistencies in, and the unlikelihood of the story of Jesus Christ. Whilst the publication sold extremely well in America, in the wake of the French Revolution audiences in Britain feared increasing political radicalism and Paine’s latest was received with hostility. Concerned about the spread of what they viewed as potentially revolutionary ideas, the British government prosecuted printers and booksellers who tried to publish and distribute the pamphlet. It also ignited a pamphlet war with around fifty unfavorable replies appearing between 1795 and 1799 alone and refutations still being published in 1812. The irreverent, mocking style Paine used was the final nail in his coffin, as the last of his supporters turned their back on him. In Britain and America it was viciously attacked and Paine, once seen as a hero of the American Revolution, had become a pariah, ridiculed and loathed equally. Paine became so reviled in America that he could still be maligned as a ‘filthy little atheist’ by Theodore Roosevelt over one hundred years later. Despite all of these attacks, Paine never wavered in his beliefs; when dying, a woman came to visit him, claiming that God had instructed her to save his soul. Paine dismissed her: ‘pooh, pooh, it is not true. You were not sent with any such impertinent message … Pshaw, He would not send such a foolish ugly old woman as you about with His message.’ The Father of the American Revolution ended his life bankrupt, an outcast and with only six mourners attending his funeral. His obituary in the New York Post stated, ‘He had lived long, did some good and much harm.’
The freedom of the press is the right to circulate opinion and news through various media without censorship by the government. It is a right that has been hard fought for in the UK and countries around the world. Today we stand fortieth out of 180 countries on the 2018 World Press Freedom Index, a decline of eighteen places since 2002, when the index began, making us one of the worst countries in Europe for press freedom.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the British government had various measures for censoring the press, especially the radical press, through laws on blasphemy, obscenity and libel. Whilst pamphlets had been cheap to produce and disseminate the government imposed taxes and stamp duties to increase the cost of newspapers and pamphlets so that now very few people, especially the working classes, could afford to buy them. By the early nineteenth century this included an advertisement tax, an excise duty on paper, a pamphlet duty, and a newspaper tax. This came to be known as a ‘Tax on Knowledge’, which radicals campaigned against, arguing that they prevented the working classes from accessing news and knowledge. The campaign eventually won support in Parliament and between 1836 by 1861 the taxes had either been reduced or repealed. This resulted in an explosion in the number of newspapers published in Britain and correspondingly their circulation.

Richard Carlile set up a radical-printing press in Fleet Street in 1817 publishing Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man and The Age of Reason as a series of pamphlets in order to make them affordable.
for ordinary people. Not ten years after Paine’s death, his words were still inflammatory and Carlile knew that in publishing his works he would be attracting controversy in the eyes of the law. However, he passionately supported the freedom of the press and believed that the printing press had the power to change society for the better. He also published a weekly newspaper, Sherwin’s Political Register, which reported on political meetings as well as extracts from books and poems by radical writers such as Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

THE PETERLOO MASSACRE

On 16 August 1819 Carlile was standing on a platform due to speak to a crowd of 60,000 people peacefully gathered in Peterloo, Manchester. The meeting had been organized to demand parliamentary reforms, partly as a result of an economic depression following the Napoleonic Wars that saw cuts in workers’ wages, large scale unemployment and tariffs such as the Corn Laws that forced up the price of food, causing widespread famine. These conditions led to rising support for political radicalism in the form of demands to repeal the Corn Laws, to have fairer representation in parliament and an extension of voting rights beyond male landowners of land with an annual rental value of forty shillings or more, which was far beyond the means of the majority of the male population. The current situation meant that less than three percent of people in England and Wales had the right to vote and large industrial towns such as Manchester had no MPs to represent their needs whereas infamous rotten boroughs with small populations (sometimes only a few dozen people) had two MPs.

The meeting at Peterloo had barely begun when local magistrates sent in the army to disperse the crowds and arrest the speakers. As the cavalry charged the crowd, their sabres drawn, the ensuing mayhem caused the death of fifteen people and the injury of several hundred men and women. During the chaos, Carlile was helped to escape and returned to London where he published his eyewitness account of the ‘Horrid Massacres at Manchester’ and what became known as The Peterloo Massacre. The government, wanting to prevent public support of any political reform that they felt threatened their power, responded by closing his newspaper and confiscating his stock, however Carlile merely changed the name to The Republican and in its first issue under the new name demanded that, ‘The massacre should be the daily theme of the Press until the murderers are brought to justice.’

Carlile’s determination to expose injustice led him to spend many years in jail—he was imprisoned and found guilty of blasphemy and sedition for publishing material that encouraged people to hate the government and for publishing Thomas Paine’s work. This somewhat hindered for the government in the ensuing publicity around Carlile’s trial caused the circulation of his newspaper to increase dramatically to the point where it was outselling pro-government newspapers such as The Times.

On the first day of the trial, Carlile read the entire text of The Age of Reason as part of his defence, and then sold the book as part of the trial transcript, selling over 15,000 copies.

Despite support for Carlile from the public and some of the mainstream press, he was sentenced to six years in jail. However, even with his incarceration, his and his supporters’ tireless belief in freedom of the press meant he continued to write his paper. His wife Jane Carlile took over the publication until she too was imprisoned in 1821, and latterly his sister Mary-Anne Carlile took the reigns until her imprisonment in 1822. This process was repeated with eight of his shop workers, and over 150 men and women were sent to prison for selling The Republican.

‘Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number
Shake your chains to earth like dew
We are many, they are few’

—Percy Bysshe Shelley,
The Masque of Anarchy: Written on Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester
During the Victorian era, women didn’t have the right to vote and had few legal rights: when they married they handed over their wages and physical property to their husbands. Not only did they lose control of any money or property they had, but by marrying they entered into a contract where they became property of their husbands, meaning they no longer had the right to consent to sex as he now owned his wife’s body. A husband therefore had the right to beat or rape his wife whenever he desired as long as he didn’t go so far as to murder her. The duty of a Victorian woman was one of domesticity, to stay at home, produce and raise children and look after her husband.

Within this stifling Victorian society, Annie Besant stood out as a maverick, pushing against the norms, at a time when men held all political and religious power and women were not expected to think for themselves, let alone express their thoughts. Besant entered the radical sphere of society at the age of twenty-six, leaving behind an unhappy marriage, where the Victorian expectations of the ‘dutiful woman’ had stifled her intellect, beliefs and the politically minded person she was to become.

“We were an ill-matched pair, my husband and I... he, with very high ideas of a husband’s authority and a wife’s submission – precise, methodical, easily angered and with difficulty appeased. I, accustomed to freedom, indifferent to home details, impatient, very hot-tempered and proud as Lucifer.” — Annie Besant

Annie Besant lived many lives. She was a social reformer, trade unionist, activist, socialist, feminist, atheist-turned-theosophist, independent publisher, writer, orator, advocate for Irish home rule and Indian independence leader.
Separated from her husband, Besant could begin her career as a political and social activist, writing for the radical journal, the National Reformer, and beginning her first forays into public lecturing. Her first lecture in 1874 was on Dr Ethelbert Bates’s Women, which she later published as a pamphlet. The pamphlet supported women’s rights, some twenty-five years before the women’s suffrage movement took to the streets and platforms and the suffragettes began their fight for the vote under the banner of, “deeds, not words”. The debate around women’s rights had been growing in strength out of a concern for better employment and educational opportunities for women, reform of the divorce laws, and married women’s property rights.

In 1877 became renowned for publishing a certain indecent, lewd, filthy, and obscene book ‘. They were the individuals and organisations who paved the way for all women and men to win the vote, for workers’ rights, for free speech, for the abolition of slavery and who demanded an end to poverty through better housing conditions, welfare benefits and access to free education. Our present day pamphleteers have now moved into the digital age, with the likes of Josephine Butler, working-class women, liberals and feminists, and presented over a quarter of a million signatures from women that were laid upon the floor of Parliament (as the petition was too large for a discussion of why people have sex, arguing that reproductive health depends on adequate sexual education—a very progressive idea for this time! Besant and Bradlaugh were well aware of the consequences of publishing such a pamphlet (the previous year, Bruttlis housekeeper Henry Cocks was sentenced to two years’ hard labour for selling it). They intended to be arrested and put on trial for its publication, knowing the publicity of that would generate a public debate and that if they won the case it would be a great victory for free speech. ‘We republish this pamphlet, honestly believing that on all questions affecting the happiness of the people, whether they be theological, political or social, fullest right of free discussion ought to be maintained at all times and the voices of the disenfranchised were heard in order to make the world a better, more equal place.

In 1877 became renowned for publishing a certain indecent, lewd, filthy, and obscene book ‘. They were the individuals and organisations who paved the way for all women and men to win the vote, for workers’ rights, for free speech, for the abolition of slavery and who demanded an end to poverty through better housing conditions, welfare benefits and access to free education. Our present day pamphleteers have now moved into the digital age, with the likes of Josephine Butler, working-class women, liberals and feminists, and presented over a quarter of a million signatures from women that were laid upon the floor of Parliament (as the petition was too large for a discussion of why people have sex, arguing that reproductive health depends on adequate sexual education—a very progressive idea for this time! Besant and Bradlaugh were well aware of the consequences of publishing such a pamphlet (the previous year, Bruttlis housekeeper Henry Cocks was sentenced to two years’ hard labour for selling it). They intended to be arrested and put on trial for its publication, knowing the publicity of that would generate a public debate and that if they won the case it would be a great victory for free speech. ‘We republish this pamphlet, honestly believing that on all questions affecting the happiness of the people, whether they be theological, political or social, fullest right of free discussion ought to be maintained at all times and the voices of the disenfranchised were heard in order to make the world a better, more equal place.

The Contagious Diseases Acts were eventually repealed some twenty years later in 1883, after years of vigorous campaigning from reform organisations. The campaign had been long and hard-fought. The likes of Josephine Butler, and many other women, had rushed their good names and reputations even by talking about the subject matter of sex and prostitution. They had provided information and legal advice to working-class women to help them stand up to the government and their ‘Spy police’. Along the way they gained support from prostitutes, the Salvation Army, the Quakers, working-class men and women, liberals and feminists, and presented over a quarter of a million signatures from women who were laid upon the floor of Parliament (as the petition was too large for a discussion of why people have sex, arguing that reproductive health depends on adequate sexual education—a very progressive idea for this time! Besant and Bradlaugh were well aware of the consequences of publishing such a pamphlet (the previous year, Bruttlis housekeeper Henry Cocks was sentenced to two years’ hard labour for selling it). They intended to be arrested and put on trial for its publication, knowing the publicity of that would generate a public debate and that if they won the case it would be a great victory for free speech. ‘We republish this pamphlet, honestly believing that on all questions affecting the happiness of the people, whether they be theological, political or social, fullest right of free discussion ought to be maintained at all times and the voices of the disenfranchised were heard in order to make the world a better, more equal place.

The pamphlet outlines the negative impact of prostitution on the physical and mental health of women and men. Besant says of men opposing campaigns to end prostitution that ‘their loud indignation looks very much like the angry dread of a slave-owner who fears that the abolitionist preacher may deprecate his of the services of his human property’. She goes on to identify female prostitutes as ‘white slaves’ and men who use prostitutes as slaves to their own lust. Besant presents government regulation of prostitution, through the Contagious Diseases Acts, as depriving women of custody of their own bodies. She notes the gender double standard inherent in these laws that place the entire blame for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

The pamphlet proposes solutions to eradicate prostitution, including recommending the provision of improved employment opportunities for women, as alternatives to prostitution, with equal pay to men—a feat still not entirely achieved today! Besant also sees the stigmatisation and shaming of ‘fallen women’ (women who had sex outside of marriage) as forcing vulnerable women into prostitution. The Contagious Diseases Acts were eventually repealed some twenty years later in 1883, after years of vigorous campaigning from reform organisations. The campaign had been long and hard-fought. The likes of Josephine Butler, and many other women, had rushed their good names and reputations even by talking about the subject matter of sex and prostitution. They had provided information and legal advice to working-class women to help them stand up to the government and their ‘Spy police’. Along the way they gained support from prostitutes, the Salvation Army, the Quakers, working-class men and women, liberals and feminists, and presented over a quarter of a million signatures from women that were laid upon the floor of Parliament (as the petition was too large for a table). Removing the repeal of the Acts.

The Legalisation of Female Slavery in England (1876)
CREATIVE WRITING

TWITTER PAMPHLEETERS

Get the students to work in groups to set up Twitter (or, alternatively, Facebook or LinkedIn) accounts for the pamphleteers mentioned in Conway Hall sessions or this learning pack.

Create a mini Twitter biography for the pamphleteer and choose a photo from Conway Hall’s website or elsewhere online for their portrait photo.

Use the biographies and potted histories to create some fictional tweets based on fact.

Examples of types of tweets:

Annie Besant—Met @josephinebutler to talk about how we can win the war against this misogynistic government policy towards women. #ContagiousDiseasesAct, #EqualityForWomen

Richard Carlile—Looking forward to speaking at Peterloo today. #GovernmentReform #BanCornLaws #VotesForAll

Tom Paine—Met Benjamin Franklin today. Inspired me to make the move to the colonies to create a better world. #FranklinForPresident #MovingHome #NewWorldUtopia

PETERLOO IMAGINED

Imagine you are attending the demonstration at Peterloo. Write an account of your experience. What were your hopes in attending? Why were you attending? What happened when the cavalry charged? What did you see, how did you feel? Do you believe things will change? Are there hopes that the government will listen?

RADICAL POETRY

Choose one of the pamphleteers and write a poem inspired by the person and/or the things they have done. For example: Tom Paine—revolutionary, Richard Carlile—jailed for his beliefs, Annie Besant—women’s rights, losing religion.

MODERN PAMPHLEETER

Imagine you are a pamphleteer or contemporary blogger. What issues do you feel strongly about? Write a pamphlet, zine or blog post describing why these issues are important to you. Examples may include social housing, women’s rights, free speech, climate change, children rights, animal rights, hate speech.

ARTICLES AND RESEARCH

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?

Research one or more of these rights and debate and write about why they are important historically and contemporarily:

Freedom of Speech
Civil Rights
Human Rights
Freedom of the Press

Do we still have these rights in the UK? What are the most pressing threats to our freedoms today?

NINETEENTH-CENTURY LINKEDIN

Create a LinkedIn profile for one of the following:

Tom Paine
Richard Carlile
Annie Besant

Include their education, career, hobbies and examples of their publications.

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Write 500–1,000 words on one of the following:

Why did people in America want independence? Did Tom Paine influence their belief in American Independence?

What were the contagious diseases acts?

Have women’s rights improved since Victorian times?

The Occupy movement

The Arab Spring

ART AND DESIGN

INFOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION

Who or what has made an impact or inspired you during the course of this project? Create an infographic using Https://www.canva.com on the person or issue, for instance:

Show who had the vote in 1817 when the Peterloo Massacre occurred.

Create a world map detailing in which countries and cities the Occupy movement spread.

Show the thirty articles that make up the United Nations Convention on Human Rights.

Display the main achievements of Annie Besant and her trade union work.

POSTER CAMPAIGN

Create a poster around an issue that is important to you. This could be access to education, freedom of speech, Brexit, affordable housing, homelessness, climate change, closures of local services (community centres, libraries, hospitals), negative stereotyping of young people.

You can use any medium you wish or have access to e.g. collage, computer graphics, paint, pen and ink, printing blocks.

‘A free press can, of course, be good or bad, but, most certainly without freedom, the press will never be anything but bad.’

—Albert Camus
If the dam of official control over information showed its first cracks during the rise of public literacy in the eighteenth century—enabling ordinary people to read books, newspapers, and pamphlets—then the advent of cheap and accessible printing in the nineteenth century heralded the waters of information starting to flow through those barriers first put up by the ruling class.

The arrival of virtually free methods to both publish and access information over the internet means that that dam now lies almost entirely in pieces. The cracks had been growing larger and the foundations slowly crumbling during the twentieth century as radio and then television made receiving information far quicker and easier for ordinary people, but crucially the power to control the broadcast of this information still lay in relatively few hands.

A sudden global decline in requirements of both resources and time to communicate ideas came with the spread of electronic communication at the start of the twenty-first century. After that, huge changes in politics and public debate were inevitable.
a might be expected, the first significant impacts of these new quick and easy methods of communication were seen in some of the most repressive countries. Tunisia, Egypt, Oman, Yemen, Syria—the places where all significant public anti-government protests had been reported as people began to utilise the new means of spreading ideas and opinions to stifler political activism and organise protest. Ruling elites from every country were quick to see the potential destabilising effects all this could have and attempted to bring events back under their control. And there was one key difference from the previous power shift towards the pamphleteers, that worked to the disadvantage of those in the favour of these new power. These new electronic forms of transmitting information between many different ordinary citizens were incredibly simple and quick to use, but they were almost equally easy to keep track of. If needed, a pamphlet could be printed in secret, handed out only to trusted groups, and read behind closed doors, but the publication and reception of messages across the internet, and especially via social media, is incredibly easy to monitor for governments and security services. In one clear example, the Syrian Electronic Army, a supposedly unofficial (though with an Arab Spring, though earlier occupations by Arab Spring protests were identified in similar Facebook users with anti-government views. In one clear example, the Syrian Electronic Media that are not dissimilar to many of the works produced by the pamphleteers well above. Also contrasting with the perception of Occupy as a digital movement are the physical occupations of large urban spaces which were its primary form of protest. While protesters tweeted photos of their hand-dug vigils to Facebook from the occupations, many of the communication methods between the protesters on the ground were strikingly low tech, including a system of hand gestures to allow people to give an opinion at the same time from within the crowd and a particular method—born of a police ban on use of voice amplifiers—for communicating the words of one speaker to large crowds, in which those around the speaker would repeat their words in batches of four or five, and others further away would in turn repeat the words of the speaker. The largest of these long-term occupations numbered in the thousands most days, with several hundred remaining overnight for periods of weeks or even months. Although the primary origin of the movement was New York and the most prominent occupation took place at Zuccotti Park near Wall Street, the largest lasting was around St Paul’s Cathedral in central London. The occupation outside the Cathedral began on 15 October 2011 and by the next day over 500 protesters had collectively agreed the following statement:

1. The current system is unsustainable. It is undemocratic and unjust. We need alternatives—this system works towards them.
2. We are all ethnics, backgrounds, genders, generations, sexualities, diversities and faiths. We stand together with occupations all over the world.
3. We refuse to pay for the banks’ crisis.
4. We do not accept the cuts in either necessary or inevitable. We reject the logic of global tax injustice and our democracy representing corporations and not the people.
5. We want regulators to be genuinely independent of the industries they regulate.
6. We support strikes on 30 November and the student action on 5 November, and actions to defend our health services, welfare, education and employment, and to stop wars and arms dealing.
7. We want structural change towards authentically global equality. The world’s resources must not be available to western governments is far more important than asset test or control over information.
8. Does the war with which western communication can be sanctioned by governments make you feel safe or threatened?

Similar elements of surveillance surrounded the next event that was seen, at least at first, as an indication of the power of the new forms of communication and as an opportunity to promote democracy and positive social change. The Occupy movement began in New York during late 2009 taking inspiration from the Arab Spring, though earlier occupations by students of US universities are often seen as early manifestations of Occupy. It became a global protest movement in which many people who were unhappy with the current political system set up semi-permanent physical camps in public places to make their dissatisfaction heard. The movement was really sparked as a response, again coordinated and organised via social media, to the impacts of the global financial crisis and the decision by many governments to impose austerity to public spending. By then all signs of government interest in in public spending. By then there was an expectation that people would wake up and to get involved in their campaigns for change. Occupied spaces could be printed in secret, handed out only to trusted groups, and read behind closed doors, but the publication and reception of messages across the internet, and especially via social media, is incredibly easy to monitor and regulate by governments and security services. With the Occupy movement, we can see an example of this in the use of social media by violent fundamentalist Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS, as well as far closer to home with the recent rise of the Alt-Right and other openly racist and misogynistic movements. For instance, the recent right-wing protests in the city of Chemnitz against immigration reportedly made use of social media both to spread the anti-immigrant ideas behind the protest and to coordinate the protests themselves. Photos showed protesters using Nazi salutes openly and there were several reports of violence against non-white residents of the city during the two days in which the protests flared.

SUGGESTED STUDENT TASKS:
Write a short reflection on one of the issues raised above, for example:
1. What is the impact of social media on political movements?
2. What are the opportunities and dangers of a lack of official control over information?
3. Does the war with which western communication can be sanctioned by governments make you feel safe or threatened?
THE FOURTH ESTATE

Their effects of democratising access to widespread publication of ideas would less impact on direct political action but have nevertheless shaped democracy in significant ways during the early years of the twenty-first century.

While many physical, financial and class-based barriers to information and publication existed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there had been significant ongoing progress in opening up access to information. A key event in this was the 1789 decision to open up parliament to reporting by professional journalists. It was this event that spawned the term the fourth estate which refers to journalists and the press. The term was first used in a 1789 book, On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, by the Scottish essayist and author Thomas Carlyle, in which he attributed it to Edmund Burke in the first parliamentary debate in which reporters were permitted access to the House of Commons.

‘Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder, there is a Fourth Estate more important far than they all.’

The other three traditional estates were the church, the nobility (or the House of Lords) and the commoners (or the House of Commons). This term shows the growing power of the press in influencing the dissemination of information and setting the agenda for public debate.

Most of the daily newspapers we know today were first established in the mid to late nineteenth century or during the twentieth century, with the notable exceptions of The Times (first published in 1785) and The Guardian (which began life as The Manchester Guardian in 1821). Others had to wait for the lifting of the newspaper tax in 1855 to begin to establish themselves.

From this time until the recent past, despite access to public information being restricted generally to the richer owners of these papers and the editors they chose to appoint, there have been many examples of newspapers conducting investigations which revealed information that would certainly not have been brought to light by any of the traditional estates as it directly harmed them both in the public perception and in many cases financially.

In many cases, investigative journalists have uncovered wrongdoing, corruption and abuses that should have been discovered by polity, but because of either corruption, cover-ups or incompetence had gone uninvestigated. Possibly the most famous journalistic investigation was that conducted by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in The Washington Post which revealed that Richard Nixon’s administration had covered-up the Watergate scandal and ensuing fraud.

This revelation became known as the Watergate scandal and eventually led to the resignation of Nixon and the conviction of forty-eight government officials. The story of Woodward and Bernstein’s investigation was immortalised in the 1976 film, All the President’s Men. The scandal did not only have far-reaching impact that even today many scandals (or in some cases completely false conspiracy theories) acquire nicknames with the suffix -gate such as plategate, gamergate and pizzagate.

There have been many other important instances in which investigative journalism has played a similar role, holding those in power accountable when the police and authorities were unable or unwilling to do so. The growing recognition of this role for journalism and the press has expanded an entire professional industry around specifically investigative journalism and there is a range of legal definitions and exemptions which allow journalists to act in ways that would usually be breaches of privacy and quite possibly breaches of criminal law, as long as they can prove that their actions are in the public interest.

The public interest in this context is a difficult term to define exactly, but the Editor’s Code of Practice published by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (a body run and funded by the press industry to provide self-regulation) defines the term as such.

The public interest includes, but is not confined to:

- Disclosing concealment, or likely concealment, of any of the above.
- Protecting public health or safety.
- Protecting the public from being maligned by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.
- Protecting a person or organisation’s failure or likely failure to comply with any obligation to which they are subject.
- Protecting a marriage or family, justice, or public interest entails changes that news can be accessed for free and so no longer be all that they are. Many would argue that the definition of the public interest entails changes that news can be accessed for free and so no longer be all that they are. Many would argue that the definition of the public interest has, and should in future, be subject to changes in attitudes within society. In Andrew Sparrow, political blogger for The Guardian, the definition is: ‘our view of what the public interest entails changes quite dramatically over time and I think, as journalists, we should be willing to fight the public interest battle on a case-by-case basis. For example, fifty years ago it was assumed that there was a public interest in knowing that an MP was gay, but little or no public interest in whether he drove home drunk, hit his wife or furnished his house using funds from non-sustainable sources. Now, obviously, it’s the other way round. Society does—and should—continually redefine what the public interest entails and journalism should be part of that.’

THE DIGITAL DEATH OF LOCAL NEWS

The local news system has never been perfect bar, broadly speaking, worked relatively well during much of the twentieth century. Local journalists would report on the small communities that they were themselves a part of and those stories of wider importance would be picked up by the national or even international press. Ultimately, the objective of raising these issues would be to get them addressed by government or law, either by amending policies or introducing new legislation or by censure of those responsible for the problems.

The digital age has had serious negative impacts on this system and in many cases these links have broken down. In large part, this is down to the way that digital publishing has changed the way that newspapers make money.

Before the availability of simple and varia-

- Disclosing a miscarriage of justice.
- Raising or contributing to a matter of public debate, including serious cases of incompetence, unethical conduct or incompetence concerning the public.
- Disclosing misconduct, or likely concealment, of any of the above.

This definition is still quite vague, but most would agree that the public interest does not extend simply to anything the public would be interested in. In this way, it should be clear that revealing details of an extra-marital affair of a celebrity or high-profile sportsperson is unlikely to be in the public interest, whereas disclosure of the same details is likely to serve the public interest if it involves a politician who has publicly stated their own strong belief in family values and the sanctity of marriage, since their statements are likely to mislead the public unless

Nor, obviously, it’s the other way round. Society does—and should—continually redefine what the public interest entails and journalism should be part of that.’

The public interest includes, but is not confined to:

- Disclosing concealment, or likely concealment, of any of the above.
- Protecting public health or safety.
- Protecting the public from being maligned by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.
- Protecting a person or organisation’s failure or likely failure to comply with any obligation to which they are subject.
- Protecting a marriage or family, justice, or
endless is far more detailed. It will record the number of people who click on each individual article, how long they spend reading it, as well as data about the readers (especially their likely spending power). Therefore, the number of clicks each article receives is measured meticulously and there is an ever-increasing desperation to ensure that articles get as many clicks as possible. It is from this desperation that we get the phenomenon of click-bait articles; news items written in deliberately provocative ways, designed to ensure as many people as possible click and share the article.

These articles may work well for maximising income, but they do little to improve the quality of public debate. If we see the purpose of journalism not simply as making profit, but also to hold power to account, find and report facts and challenge accepted narratives, then click-bait articles are often counter-productive.

In 1990, the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation, the authority in charge of Grenfell Tower,

They were eventually proven right and local and national press took notice of their warnings—half a year, and twenty-two needless deaths, too soon. Soon after, The Pan-Gazett interviewed Grant Feller, a former local journalist from the area. Asked whether he thought the concerns of residents would have been picked up by the Grenfell Community News in 1990, Feller said:

“One hundred percent yes, we would have picked up on that. If we hadn’t found that story ourselves we would have been bombarded by the editor. Any local newspaper journalist worth his or her salt would have been all over that story.”

In 1996, the Kensington and Chelsea News had ten journalists covering west London; by the time of the Grenfell fire there were just one. A little over a month after the disaster, the paper closed down.

This shows that, despite increased access to the means of online publication for community campaigners like the Grenfell Action Group, there is low accountability for those making decisions and spending money on behalf of communities.

THE RISE OF COMMUNITY JOURNALISM

However, there is some good news from all this. There are examples of people who are making local news work for communities, by pursuing alternative models of journalism. Outlets like The British and The Scot are not reliant on advertising revenue or rich owners who are interested only in profits. They have cooperative structures in which anyone who donates a small monthly amount becomes a member and is given a say on what the journalists there investigate, as well as how the organisations run. Cooperatives have their origins in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, based on the belief that industries and businesses should be owned and controlled by the people working in them, who share the profits or benefits.

For instance, The Scot, which covers the whole of Scotland, asked its members what it should investigate and the top answer was the fracking industry. They were then able to successfully research and produce a series of articles showing how large oil companies were lobbying the government to allow them to access rights to establish fracking operations on Scottish land, as well as the opposition to this in local communities and the dangers these communities were highlighting. This campaign led to the eventual moratorium imposed by the Scottish parliament which prevents any fracking from taking place on Scottish lands.

Te Bôt’s Gàidh and Te Scot are now working towards becoming financially sustainable entirely through contributions from members, who effectively co-own the organisations and have a meaningful stake in the journalism that they produce. This introduces the tantalising prospect of a new model which is free from the influence of large profit-focused corporations, the companies that provide advertising revenue, or rich individual owners with their own agendas. For far too long, people have been getting used to accessing information without cost and the argument that good, thoroughly-researched investigative journalism is a public good which needs to be independently funded cannot be made too strongly or too often.

The new community journalism outlets are actually part of the communities they report on as day to day in the areas they covered. The challenge now is not only to prove the long-term sustainability of these new models, but to replicate them for other regions and different communities across the UK.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Laws of information about government, which are local and national, is now being used as an incredibly powerful tool for transparency and is one of the fundamental rights of any democratic society. For example, it was through the use of F.O.I. that the public was given access to the expenses claims of MPs which in 2010 revealed a scandalous misuse of public money by many MPs.

Whilst there are many pieces of information on many subjects held by many different bodies (F.O.I. applies not just to government departments and local councils, but also to charities, universities, and cultural institutions such as museums and galleries), there are also many restrictions on what information can be released, such as of the request would be too costly or time-consuming to respond to or the information contains personal data. Making an F.O.I. request is as simple as sending an email, but they are often refused because of these exemptions. However, exemptions are sometimes overridden in cases where it is in the public interest to release the information.

When a request is made, the public body which receives it has twenty working days from receipt to provide a response. F.O.I., alongside such other tools as open data, represents major steps forward in promoting transparency in our democratic system, and access to information through transparent government is an essential building block for a democratic system that properly functions.

People can have universal rights to vote, but if they are not informed and have no methods through which to access information, then their votes are worse than useless—they become actively counter-productive when those in control of information can influence the votes.

But these tools are neither perfect or permanent. At present, they have major flaws and they are at risk of being taken from us in future. This is why we must fight to both keep and improve them.

The best way to do this is to use the tools for the good of the public interest. @

SUGGESTED STUDENT TASKS:

In groups, identify an issue in your school or local community which is impeding on people. Interview someone affected by the issue and ask for a resistance from someone who has responsibility for some aspect of the issue. Write up a news-style article exploring the issue and quoting those you have interviewed.
CONCLUSION:

As demonstrated in the previous pages, where pamphleteers used pamphlets to spread their ideas and generate support for change, today’s citizen journalists and online activists harness the power of social media and blogs to share information, create communities and drive change.

We can see the parallels between pamphleteers such as Thomas Paine who used the power of cheap print to ignite the American colonies’ desire for independence and the individuals and groups who harnessed social media to bring about revolution in Egypt during the early days of the Arab Springs. Richard Carlile employed pamphlets and radical newspapers to create communities of people fighting for freedom of the press, workers’ rights and equality. Today online sites such as The Ferret and The Bristol Cable follow in this tradition bringing together cooperatives of citizens, independent of vested interests, who demand reforms on local and national levels.

Annie Besant used pamphlets to give a voice to the disfranchised, helping to unionise workers, campaign for equality for women and bring access to education for all. We can see her campaigns as the forerunners to the online campaigns of #MeToo and the #Occupy movement.

What becomes apparent when making these comparisons is how the rights we are fighting for today are fundamentally linked to those of the past and how, whilst our pamphleteering forebears’ campaigning brought about changes that we benefit from today such as votes for women, free education and freedom of speech, it also highlights how very far we still have to go. We must defend those hard-won liberties and remain vigilant to the laws that protect or restrict our democratic rights to ensure that on a local, national and international level we continue to work after our human rights, safeguard the disfranchised, stand against inequality and like the pamphleteers of the past dare to dream of a better world.
Atheism: Lack of belief in the existence of deities.
Blasphemy: The act of insinuating or showing irreverence towards something or someone considered sacred.
Capitalism: An economic and political system in which a country’s trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.
Cavalry: Soldiers who fought on horseback.
Censershript: The suppression of speech, public communication or other information on the basis that such material is considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive or inconvenient as determined by a government or private institution.
Charism: A parliamentary working class reform movement of 1837–48, the principles of which were set out in a manifesto called The People’s Charter and called for universal registration under the Companies Act 2006.
CHartism: A parliamentary working class reform movement of 1837–48, the principles of which were set out in a manifesto called The People’s Charter and called for universal
Citizen Journalism: Public citizens playing an active role in collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information usually via the blogs, personal websites, social media etc.
Community Journalism: Locally-oriented, professional news coverage that typically focuses on small towns, suburbs and local communities rather than metropolitan, national or world news.
Companies House: The UK’s registrar of companies. All companies are required to register under the Companies Act 2006.
Conscientious Objector: A person who has claimed the right to refuse to perform military service on the grounds of freedom of thought, conscience, or religion.
Co-operative Movement: A movement originating in the industrial areas of northern England and Scotland in the late eighteenth century, based on the belief that industries and commercial concerns should be owned and controlled by the people working in them, for joint economic benefit.
Corn Laws: Trade restrictions Britain introduced in 1815 to prevent domestic farmers against foreign competition by introducing a heavy duty on imported corn. Repealed in 1846.
Censorship: Suppression of speech, public communication, or other information on the basis that such material is considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, or inconvenient as determined by a government or private institution.
Commercial concerns should be owned and controlled by the people working in them, for joint economic benefit.
CPSR: A public or private institution.
CPSR: A public or private institution.
Dogma: A principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true.
Dawg: A representation of a person, especially one of a hated person made to be damaged as a protest.
Ethics: The branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles.
Ethics: The branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles.
Fifth Estate: The press.
Freedom of Expression: The power or right to express an opinion without censorship or legal penalty.
Freedom of the Press: The right to circulate opinions in print without censorship by the government.
FreeThought (or Free Thought): A philosophical viewpoint, especially in matters of religion, which holds that positions regarding truth should be formed on the basis of logic, reason, and empiricism, rather than authority, tradition, revelation, or dogma.
Humanism: Rejection of religion and the supernatural in favour of the advancement of humanity by its own rational efforts.
Independent Press Standards Organisation: Establishment in 2014 the IPSO is the independent regulator of most of the UK’s magazines and newspapers. It exists to promote and uphold the highest professional standards of journalism in the UK, and to support mem-
Kings: A form of government with a single person at the head; titles may be king, queen, emperor etc.
Labour Movement: A series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions beginning in Tunisia and spreading across the Middle East in early 2011.
Libel: A published false statement that is damaging to a person’s reputation.
Lock Hospital: An establishment that specialized in treating sexually transmitted disease. They operated in Britain and its territories from the eighteenth century to the twentieth. The medical had a close association with the hospitals.
Maverick: An unorthodox or independent-minded person.
Monarchy: A form of government with a single person at the head; titles may be king, queen, emperor etc.
Occupy Movement: An international progressive, socio-political movement against social and economic inequality. It aimed to advance social and economic justice and new forms of democracy.
Pamphlet: A small booklet, usually less than forty pages, with no hard cover or binding; historically pamphlets have been an important means of distributing information and furthering public debate in support of political protest and social campaigns.
Political Reform: Improving the laws and constitution in accordance with the expectations of the public.
Poor Law 1601: The Poor Law Amendment Act was an Act of Parliament passed by the Whig Government led by Earl Grey attempting to change fundamentally the poverty relief system in England and Wales. Many opposed it believing it to be the beginning of the workhouses or "prisons for the poor".
Printing Press: A machine for printing text or pictures from type or plates.
Quakers: A member of the Religious Society of Friends, a Christian movement founded by George Fox c. 1650 and devoted to peaceful principles. Central to the Quakers’ belief in the doctrine of the ‘Inner Light’, or sense of Christ’s direct working in the soul. This has led them to reject both formal ministry and all set forms of worship.
Radical (noun): A person who advocates thorough or complete political or social reform.
Rationalism: The practice or principle of basing opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response.

Republic: A state in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives, and which has an elected or nominated president rather than a monarch.

Republican: An advocate of Republican government.

Rhetoric: Using speech to convince or persuade, especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.

Rotten Borough: A rotten or pocket borough was a parliamentary borough or constituency in England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom before the Reform Act of 1832, which had a very small electorate and could be used by a patron to gain unrepresentative influence within the unreformed House of Commons.

Sabre: A sword with a curved blade associated with the cavalry of the early modern and Napoleonic periods.

Salvation Army: A Protestant Christian Church and international charitable organisation founded in London in 1865 by William and Catherine Booth.

Secularism: The separation of religion from state affairs.

Seditious Libel: The crime of making public statements that threaten to undermine respect for the government laws or public officials.

Slavery: The condition of being the legal property of another and being forced to obey them.

Social Reform: A social movement that aims to bring social and political change gradually rather than rapid or fundamental changes to society.

Socialism: A political and economic theory of social organisation which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.

Suffrage: The right to vote in political elections.

Syrian Electronic Army: A group of computer hackers that first operated in 2011 supporting the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Using spamming, website defacement, malware, phishing etc. it targeted political opposition groups, western news organisations, human rights groups and websites that appeared seemingly neutral to the Syrian conflict.

Tolpuddle Martyrs: A group of farm workers led by Methodist lay preacher George Loveless who planned collective action to protect their living standards. They were convicted for taking a secret oath and, in 1834, sent to a penal colony in New South Wales for seven years.

Unitarianism: A Christian theological movement named for its belief that God in Christianity is one person, as opposed to the Trinity (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). More broadly the term is often used to describe an open-minded and individualistic approach to religion accommodating a wide range of beliefs and doubts.

Watergate: On the morning of 17 June, 1972, burglars were arrested in the office of the Democratic National Committee, located in the Watergate complex of buildings in Washington, D.C. The burglars were connected to Republican President Richard Nixon’s re-election campaign, and were caught wiretapping phones and stealing documents. Nixon took aggressive steps to cover up his connection to the crime, and in August 1973, after his role in the conspiracy was revealed, Nixon resigned. The Watergate scandal fundamentally changed American politics, leading many Americans to question their leaders and think more critically about the presidency.
Thomas Paine was one of the first journalists to use media as a weapon against the entrenched power structure. He should be resurrected as the moral father of the Internet.” — Jon Katz

Thomas Paine was an English-born political activist, philosopher, pamphleteer and revolutionary described by historian Saul K. Padovar as ‘a corsetmaker by trade, a journalist by profession, and a propagandist by inclination.’

The son of a Quaker stay-maker, Paine was educated at the local grammar school and at the age of thirteen became an apprentice stay-maker in Kent. This was followed by work as an exciseman in Lincolnshire and a school teacher in London. In 1772, he wrote his first pamphlet, an argument outlining the work grievances of his fellow excise officers. Paine printed 4,000 copies and distributed them to members of British Parliament.

Paine emigrated to the British American colonies at the start of the American Revolution. He settled in Philadelphia where he became editor of the Pennsylvania Magazine. Paine’s seminal 1775 essay, *African Slavery in America*, was published in this periodical, and the piece paved the way for the country’s first anti-slavery society to be set up just a few weeks later, with Paine one of its founders.

Paine’s volume *Common Sense* (1776) advocated the right of the American colonies to be free of British rule and argued for republicanism as the sole rational means of government. It was the most widely read pamphlet of the Revolution selling more than half a million copies and paved the way for the Declaration of Independence. It has been argued that the engaging and irreverent prose style which Paine adopted was more innovatory than the message.

Charged with seditious libel for advocating an end to monarchy in Britain, Paine fled to France and became deeply involved in the French Revolution. *The Rights of Man* (1791) posits that popular political revolution is permissible when a government does not safeguard the natural rights of its people. In 1793 Paine was imprisoned in Paris for refusing to endorse the execution of Louis XVI and began to write *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (1794–1807) in which he advocated deism, promoted reason and freethought, and argued against institutional religion in general and Christian doctrine in particular. It proffered a new vision of the republican state as a promoter of social welfare redressing poverty through an interventionist programme of welfare redistribution, including old-age pensions, marriage allowances and maternity benefits. Paine’s pamphlet *Agrarian Justice* (1797) discussed the origins of property and introduced the concept of a national minimum wage.

Paine was also an inventor and engineer and was fascinated by bridges. Perhaps his most impressive engineering feat was the Sunderland Bridge crossing the Wear River at Wearmouth. This 240-foot span bridge was completed in 1796. Only the second cast iron bridge ever built, it was, at the time, also the largest single-span bridge in the world. Renovated in 1867, the bridge remained until 1927, when it was replaced with the current crossing.

Thomas Paine’s revolutionary activism and rejection of traditional Christian doctrine tarnished his reputation and he died alone in America in 1809, shunned by the country he had helped create, reviled as an infidel, denied the right to vote, his grave desecrated and his body remains stolen. There were but six mourners at his funeral, half of them former slaves. The *New York City* wrote in its obituary ‘He had lived long, did some good and much harm.’ A popular nursery rhyme ran:

_Nice Tom Paine_! _there he lies_,
_Nobody laughs and nobody cries_,
_Where is he gone or how he fares_
_Nobody knows and nobody cares._

Despite this sorry end to his life, Paine’s writing greatly influenced his contemporaries and inspired such future radical thinkers and reformers as William Cobbett, Richard Carlile, Moncure Conway, Charles Bradlaugh, Bertrand Russell and Christopher Hitchens.

_Thomas Paine, 1737–1809_
Mary Wollstonecraft, 1759–97

‘It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world.’
— Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft was a moral and political philosopher and advocate of women’s rights, whose analysis of the condition of women in contemporary society retains much of its original radicalism although her achievements until the twentieth century were much less regarded and reported than her unconventional relationships. After ill-fated affairs with the painter Henry Fuseli and American businessman Gilbert Imlay, Wollstonecraft married the philosopher William Godwin, one of the founders of the anarchists’ movement. Wollstonecraft died at the age of thirty-eight, eleven days after giving birth to her second daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, future author of the Gothic novel, Frankenstein.

After Wollstonecraft’s death, her widower published a memoir (1798) of her life, often cited as the first biography, revealing her unorthodox lifestyle. It was a brave and honest account which tarnished her reputation for almost a century as she was reviled as a prostitute, described by Horace Walpole, ‘a hyena in petticoats’. Scurrilous poems abounded, including a piece called ‘To Un-sex’d Female; this was poetry functioning as an eighteenth-century Twitter, trolls mocking Wollstonecraft as a ‘poor maniac’ a ‘voluptuous’ victim of ‘licentious love.’ With the emergence of the feminist movement at the turn of the twentieth century, however, Wollstonecraft’s advocacy of women’s equality and critiques of conventional femininity became increasingly important. As a key Enlightenment philosopher, her ideas on justice and education have become core values in Britain and beyond. Her words directly informed Gladstone’s plans for state education in 1870 and today Wollstonecraft is regarded as one of the founding feminist philosophers.

With her sister Eliza and friend Fanny Blood, Wollstonecraft set up a girl’s school in Newington Green in 1774, a community of dissident intellectuals and free thinkers. Wollstonecraft was then a young schoolmistress, as yet unpublished, but the libertarian and republican Richard Price saw something in her worth fostering, becoming a friend and mentor. Through him she met the humanitarian and radical publisher Joseph Johnson, who was to guide her career and serve as a father figure. Through him, she published Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (subtitled with reflections on female conduct, in the more important duties of life) which was less a radical tract than a didactic work on female manners. The ideas Wollstonecraft ingested from the sermons at Newington Green Unitarian Church pushed her towards a political awakening. After leaving Newington Green, these seeds germinated into A Vindication of the Rights of Man (1790), a response to Edmund Burke’s condemnation of the French Revolution. Her response attacked his idea of monarchy and hereditary privilege that supported an unequal society and saw women as weak and passive. Here was the first response in a pamphlet war that became known as the Revolution Controversy, in which Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man (1792) became the rallying cry for reformers and radicals debating the French Revolution. In September 1791, Wollstonecraft began A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects (1782) arguing that in most cases, marriage was solely a property relation, and that the education women received ensured that they could not meet the expectations society had of them almost certainly guaranteeing an unhappy life. In the chapter On National Education, she recommends the establishment of a national education system of mixed-sex schools. She also argues it essential for women’s dignity that they be given the right and the ability to earn their own living and support themselves.

In 2018 the artist Maggi Hambling was commissioned to capture the spirit and strength of Wollstonecraft in a sculpture to be erected on Newington Green, North London where Wollstonecraft had her roots. The plinth will incorporate Mary’s most famous quotation: ‘I do not wish women to have power over men but over themselves.’ The sculpture is designed to encourage a visual conversation with the obstacles Wollstonecraft overcame, the ideals she strove for, and what she made happen.’ Hambling said. ‘In this sculpture female forms commingle, rising inseparably into one another, transforming and culminating in the figure of a woman standing, free, her own person, ready to confront the world. The figure embodies all women.’
I will not droop! but sweep away
The juggling fiends who tax and pray,
And though in jail with limbs confin’d,
I still am free in soul and mind! —Richard Carlile

Richard Carlile was an agitator for the establishment of universal suffrage and freedom of the press in the United Kingdom. Born in Devon, his father was a shoemaker who died when Carlile was only four years old, leaving his mother struggling to support her three children on the income from running a small shop. At the age of six Richard went to the local Church of England school for a free education and then, at the age of twelve, left school for a seven-year apprenticeship to a tinsmith in the port city of Plymouth.

In the winter of 1816 Carlile had his hours working as a tinplateman reduced; the hardship that this caused his family fuelled his growing sense of injustice and he began to attend political meetings where speakers would declaim the parliamentary system that only allowed three men in every hundred to vote. He decided to try and earn a living by selling pamphlets on the streets in London commenting that he often walked thirty miles for a profit of eighteen pence. He was soon imprisoned for four months without trial for reprinting parodies of church services originally published by satirist and bookseller William Hone. He later rented a shop in Fleet Street and became a publisher publishing such works as Thomas Paine’s The Rights of Man by dividing them into sections and selling them as pamphlets.

In 1819 he witnessed the Peterloo massacre where cavalry charged into a crowd of 60-80,000 who had gathered to demand the reform of parliamentary representation. He published his denunciation in radical newspaper The Republican which he edited and was again imprisoned without trial. The same year he was imprisoned for publishing Paine’s The Age of Reason (which advocated the rights of the people to overthrow their governments), sentenced to three years in Dorchester prison for blasphemy and seditious libel, and fined £1,500; the sentence being extended to six years because of his inability to pay. Ironically this was the period of Carlile’s greatest fame; he continued to edit The Republican as well as many freethinking tracts by Shelley, Voltaire and others. His wife, Jane Carlile continued to publish The Republican once Carlile had been jailed and was in turn sentenced to two-year imprisonment for sedition libel. Mary Carlile, the sister of Richard Carlile, took over as publisher and within six months was imprisoned for the same offence. In the end eight of his shop workers, and over 150 men and women were sent to prison for selling The Republican. Carlile’s writing desk from his time in Dorchester jail sits in the corner the Conway Hall Library to this day.

By 1821, Carlile had moved from deism to atheism and became the first person in Britain to deny, in print, the existence of God. In 1826 he published an essay What is Love? describing and defending contraceptive techniques.

He was freed from jail in 1825 and in 1829 opened the Rotunda on Blackfriars Road making it a centre of radical theological and political discussion. In 1831 he was in prison again for expressing sympathy for agricultural workers campaigning against wage cuts and advising the strikers to regard themselves as being at war with the government.

Released in 1833, Carlile left his wife and was joined by the freethinker Eliza Sharples who had already given birth to their first child, conceived while he was in prison. They had at least three further children. Having left prison deeply in debt, Carlile was no longer able to publish newspapers, but he was jailed once more for causing a public nuisance by refusing to pay church rates and displaying blasphemous effigies in his shop windows.

Carlile died in extreme poverty back in Fleet Street in 1843 at the age of fifty-three, leaving his body to anatomical science. Nine years, seven months and one week of his life had been spent in prison. Following his death, his body was dissected and people, including members of his own family, purchased tickets to watch it!
Annie Besant, 1847–1933

‘Better remain silent, better not even think, if you are not prepared to act.’—Annie Besant

Annie Besant was a social reformer, activist, socialist, feminist, atheist-turned-theosophist, independent publisher, writer, advocate for Irish home rule and Indian independence leader—she was a busy woman. She was born Annie Wood in London, to a middle-class family of Irish descent. Her father died when she was five years old, leaving the family financially unstable, so Annie was sent to live with a family friend, Ellen Marryat. Marryat ensured that Annie received a thorough education, teaching her a broad variety of subjects and encouraging her to think critically and to not underestimate her abilities as a woman. Marryat was also devoutly religious—Besant described her as a fanatic—and Besant was made to study the Bible and *Foxes Book of Martyrs* closely; this evangelical education, whilst encouraging Besant’s later atheism, also likely inspired her intense sense of social duty. In 1867, she married the clergyman Frank Besant and they had two children, though the marriage ended in 1873, due to her increasingly anti-religious views.

Following her separation, Besant became closely associated with Charles Bradlaugh and his newly-formed National Secular Society (NSS) and began co-editing Bradlaugh’s secularist journal, *The National Reformer*. In 1877, Annie Besant was sent to court, alongside Bradlaugh, on obscenity charges for establishing the Freethought Publishing Company in order to republish an instructive birth control pamphlet, *Fruits of Philosophy*. They won the trial on a technicality, paving the way for future publishers to publish literature around birth control, however the scandal around the trial led to her losing custody of her children.

As well as her secular links, Besant was also a member of the socialist Fabian Society from the 1880s in which she became involved through her friendship with George Bernard Shaw. In 1887, the Fabians became involved in protests against widespread unemployment and on the thirteenth of November, a protest at Trafalgar Square ended in riots with many people being injured, one death and hundreds of arrests. The events came to be known as Bloody Sunday and Besant became heavily involved in supporting the jailed workers and their families.

In 1888, Annie Besant supported female workers at the Bryant and May match factory in their successful strike for fair pay and improved working conditions. The women had protested against starvation wages and the terrible effects on their health of phosphorus fumes. The success of this action led to the formation of the Matchgirls’ Union, of which Besant was leader, which acted as inspiration to workers throughout the UK to unionise and campaign for employment rights.

That same year Besant was elected to the London School Board, winning with over 15,000 votes. Women at that time were still not able to take part in parliamentary politics, but had been accepted into the local electorate in 1881. Besant’s manifesto proclaimed, ‘No more hungry children’ and her campaign utilised her feminist beliefs, ‘I ask the electors to vote for me, and the non-electors to work for me because women are wanted on the Board and there are too few women candidates.’ On winning the election Besant wrote in the *National Reformer*: ‘Ten years ago, under a cruel law, Christian bigotry robbed me of my little child. Now the care of the 763,680 children of London is placed partly in my hands.’

Continuing to campaign and write about a number of issues around women’s rights, secularism and social inequality, Besant also became interested in theosophy. This was a new religious movement founded by Helena Blavatsky, a Russian religious mystic, based upon Hindu teachings of karma and reincarnation. Besant was international president of the Theosophical Society from 1907 until her death, and she moved eventually to live in Madras, India for this role. Whilst in India, she became involved in the Indian nationalist movement and in 1916 established the Indian Home Rule League. Besant spent the rest of her life in India, aside for a period touring the USA in the late 1920s with her protégé and adopted son, Jiddu Krishnamurti, whom she claimed was the reincarnation of Buddha.
Charles Bradlaugh, 1833–91

‘Better a thousandfold abuse of free speech than denial of free speech. Abuse dies in a day, but the denial stays the life of the people, and entombs the hopes of a race.’ —Charles Bradlaugh

Charles Bradlaugh was an atheist, a political activist, politician, lawyer, publisher, orator and founder, in 1866, of the National Secular Society. In 1880 he was elected as the Liberal MP for Northampton. In order to take his seat he was required to swear, on the bible, an oath of allegiance to the crown. As an atheist and republican he preferred not to take an oath to God and the Queen but presented the speaker with a letter ‘begging respectfully’ that he be permitted to affirm instead. This, and his subsequent attempt to take the oath, were both refused. Bradlaugh declined to leave the House of Commons and the Sergeant-at-Arms was called forcibly to take him into custody where he was incarcerated for the night in the Prison Room of the clock tower that holds Big Ben. He is the last person ever to have been imprisoned in the cell of what we now call the Elizabeth Tower. Unable to take his seat it effectively became vacant but, following four successive by-elections, Bradlaugh regaining his seat on each occasion, he was finally allowed to take an oath in 1886. A parliamentary bill (that he proposed) became law in 1888, ensuring in law the right of members of both Houses of Parliament to affirm, if they so wished, when being sworn in.

As a young man he became a Sunday School teacher but soon questioned the doctrines of the Anglican Church and the Bible. He was suspended from teaching by the vicar and turned out of the family home, before being taken in by Eliza Sharles Carlile, the widow of Richard Carlile, who had been imprisoned for printing Thomas Paine’s The Age of Reason. Soon he was introduced to George Holyoake, who organised Bradlaugh’s first public lecture as an atheist and, at the age of seventeen, he published his first pamphlet, A Few Words on the Christian Creed. Bradlaugh became a convinced freethinker and pamphleteer and many works followed including tracts on women’s rights, poverty, Indian home rule, and labour laws. He became President of the London Secular Society from 1858. In 1860 he became editor of the secularist newspaper, the National Reformer, and in 1866 co-founded the National Secular Society, in which Annie Besant became his close associate. The founding principles of the nss were: ‘to promote human happiness, to fight religion as an obstruction, to attack the legal barriers to Freethought.’ The organisation stood against religious privilege and demanded a secularised society, including an end to all political support for religious purposes and especially the disestablishment of the Church of England. In 1868, The Reformer was prosecuted by the British Government for blasphemy and sedition. Bradlaugh was eventually acquitted on all charges, though fierce controversy continued in the courts and in the press.

Bradlaugh and Besant formed the Freethought Publishing Company and in 1876 decided to republish the American Charles Knowlton’s pamphlet advocating birth control, The Fruits of Philosophy, or the Private Companion of Young Married People (1832) whose previous British publisher had already been successfully prosecuted for obscenity. The two activists were tried in 1877 and sentenced to heavy fines and six months’ imprisonment, but their conviction was overturned by the Court of Appeal on the basis that the prosecution had not set out the precise words which were alleged to be obscene in the indictment. As a result of the trial, the Malthusian League was founded in order to advocate for the elimination of penalties for promoting birth control as well as to promote public education in matters of contraception.

Bradlaugh died in 1891. His funeral and burial in unconsecrated ground was attended by 3,000 mourners, including a twenty-one-year-old Mohandas Gandhi. Bradlaugh’s daughter, Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner, became a peace activist, author, atheist and freethinker, and, after her father’s death she wrote a pamphlet ‘Of Charles Bradlaugh the as Atheist?’ (1893) in answer to the many who questioned her as to whether her father had ‘changed his opinions and became a Christian’ before he died. Bonner set out the evidence and concluded that her father had given no indication that his beliefs had changed in the ‘smallest’ way.
Josephine Butler, 1828–1906

‘It is a fact, that numbers of moral and religious people have permitted themselves to accept and condone in man what is fiercely condemned in woman.’ —Josephine Butler

Josephine Butler was an English feminist and social reformer who devoted her life to improving the intellectual, spiritual and financial prospects of women of all classes. She campaigned for women’s suffrage, the right of women to better education, the end of coverture in British law (a law that made women the property of their husbands upon marriage), the abolition of child prostitution and an end to the human trafficking of young women and children into European prostitution.

Butler grew up in a relatively wealthy and politically connected progressive family which helped develop her a strong social conscience and firmly held religious ideals. Her father, John Grey, was a strong proponent of social reform and a campaigner against the slave trade, and his cousin was Earl Grey, British prime minister between 1830 and 1834. After her marriage to an Anglican divine and teacher Butler began to campaign for women’s rights in British law.

In 1867 Butler joined Anne Jemima Clough in establishing courses of advanced study for women. In 1868 she published The Education and Employment of Women. In her pamphlet, she argued for improved educational and employment opportunities for single women. Later that year she was appointed president of the North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women and became involved in the campaign to persuade Cambridge University to provide more opportunities for women students. This campaign resulted in the provision of lectures for women and later the establishment of Newnham College.

In 1869 she became involved in the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, legislation that attempted to control the spread of venereal diseases—particularly in the British armed forces—through the forced medical examination of prostitutes, a process she described as surgical or steel rape. Butler toured the country making speeches denouncing the acts and attracted large audiences to hear her explain why these laws needed to be repealed. Many people were shocked that a woman would speak in public about sexual matters. The campaign achieved its final success in 1886 with the repeal of the Acts.

Butler also formed the International Abolitionist Federation, a Europe-wide organisation to combat similar systems on the continent. This came about as a result of touring European countries to gain support in the campaign against commercial sexual exploitation and state regulation of prostitution. Butler was influential in France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands, where groups of women were stirred into action to campaign for the civil rights of prostitutes.

Butler became involved in the campaign against child prostitution. In 1885 she joined with Florence Booth of the Salvation Army and William Thomas Stead, the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette, to expose white slave traffic. They used the case of Eliza Armstrong, a thirteen year-old daughter of a chimney-sweep, who was bought for five pounds by a woman working for a London brothel. As a result of the publicity that the Armstrong case generated, Parliament passed the Criminal Law Amendment Act that raised the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen. Her final campaign was in the late-1890s, against the Contagious Diseases Acts which continued to be implemented in the British Raj.

Josephine Butler wrote more than ninety books and pamphlets, the majority supporting her campaigning. Although Josephine Butler worked with, and campaigned for, women who were regarded as immoral by contemporary standards she was able to keep her own reputation intact by her firm adherence to the acceptable rules assigned to her sex by Victorian society: marriage, motherhood, morality and purity.

Her campaign strategies changed the way feminists and suffragists conducted future struggles. After her death in 1906, the feminist intellectual Millicent Fawcett hailed her as ‘the most distinguished Englishwoman of the nineteenth century.’
ALDRED, Guy Alfred. Richard Carlile, Agitator : His Life and Times (Serif Island Press, 1941).


COCKBURN, Patrick & FISK, Robert. Arab Spring Then and Now : From Hope to Despair (Independent Print Limited, 2017).


GLEADLE, Kathryn. The Early Feminists : Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women’s Rights Movement, 1831–1851 (Studies in Gender History) (St Martin’s Press, 1998).


OLIVER, James A. The Pamphleteer: the Birth of Journalism, Emergence of the Press & the Fourth Estate (Information Architects, 2010).


PANKhurst, Helen. Deeds Not Words : the Story of Women’s Rights, Then and Now (Sceptre, 2018).


WEBSITES

BIG BROTHER WATCH
Big Brother Watch exposes and challenges threats to privacy, freedoms and civil liberties at a time of enormous technological change in the United Kingdom.

THE BRISTOL CABLE
This media-cooperative, community-powered newspaper is independent and centred on public-interest journalism.
https://thebristolcable.org/

THE BRITISH LIBRARY ONLINE EXHIBITIONS
The British Library’s online exhibitions showcase works from various collections covering such subjects as Victorian Britain, Votes for Women, Windrush Stories, Suffrothod and After and the American Revolution.
https://www.bl.uk/discover-and-learn/online-exhibitions

CONWAY HALL DIGITAL COLLECTIONS
Conway Hall’s own digitisation platform, including our treasured trove of nineteenth century pamphlets, being digitised as part of the wider Victorian Biggby project.
https://conwayhallcollections.omeka.net/

THE FERRET
An independent investigative journalism platform for Scotland with the strapline, ‘Whatever happens, The Ferret will be nosing up the trousers of power.’
https://theferret.scot/

FOI MAN
Free resources and information on subjects surrounding freedom of information, environmental information and privacy.
https://www.foiman.com/

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
Educational resources covering various nineteenth century subjects such as the Poor Law, the Factory Act, Victorian prisons and the abolition of slavery.

LIBRARY OF ‘THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
Excellent source for primary materials covering such subjects as labour, employment and working lives, prostitution and trafficking, women’s rights and suffrage and LGBT rights. A trove of copyright-free images.
http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/collections/collection-highlights/collections-highlights

OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY
If you have a library card you can access the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography for free at your local library. Published since 1885 it is the standard reference work on notable figures from British history. It weighs in at sixty volumes covering 54,922 lives.
http://www.oxforddnb.com/

SPARTACUS EDUCATIONAL
An excellent resource for biographies and information on historical events and movements, including:
- Richard Carlile
- Annie Besant
- Josephine Butler
- Thomas Paine
- The American Revolution
- The French Revolution
- The Contagious Diseases Acts
http://spartacus-educational.com

WIKIPEDIA
Wikipedia is a good starting point for finding information but remember that anyone can access and edit it so it is essential to check your information from other reliable sources.

YOUTUBE
The Mark Steel Lectures. Excellent series of talks on various radicals using humour as well as facts. Includes introductions to historical figures such as Tom Paine, Charles Darwin, Sylvia Pankhurst and Mary Shelley.
- ‘The Mark Steel Lectures—Tom Paine’
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1c0d6TSig0
- Playlist of other Mark Steel lectures:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLm3nVup3b0gOpkKmK7S5gC5GFQ8Qd0

FURTHER READING:

ARTICLES

Assad masses Syrian cyber army in online crackdown

Occupy Wall Street officer Anthony Bologna ‘broke pepper-spray rules’
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/18/occupy-wall-street-pepper-spray-officer

Occupy Wall Street: Tahrir Over Here?
https://www.fastcompany.com/1781840/occupy-wall-street-tahrir-over-here

Why Did F.B.I. Monitor Occupy Houston, and Then Hide Sniper Plot Against Protest Leaders?
https://www.democracynow.org/2014/3/25/why_did_fbi_monitor_occupy_houston

‘Freedom of speech gives us the right to offend others, whereas freedom of thought gives them the choice as to whether or not to be offended.’
—Mokokoma Mokhonoana
Many thanks to St Bride Foundation for allowing us access to their histori-cal collection of printing presses to produce photographs for this pack.
'Ever wondered what Victorian-era social media would look like? Without the wonders of Twitter and Facebook, the humble pamphlet was crucial to sharing information, radical ideas, political debate and yes, even pictures of cats. As community life quickly changed, pamphlets became the blogs of their day. I am delighted that money from National Lottery players will support digitisation and public access, bringing this wonderful collection to life once more.'

— Stuart Hobley, head, HLF London

‘We have it in our power to begin the world over again.’

— Thomas Paine, Common Sense