



Susannah Wright nee Godber c1792 – 1828??

Radical Bookseller

Susannah was born in Nottingham, to Sarah and Robert Godber who lived at 10 Kid Street, near the bottom of Goosegate. Her father was a framework knitter and she had a younger brother James, and two sisters, Sarah and Elizabeth. Susannah made her living as a lace worker. Her family was clearly politically aware and intelligent, and she was able to develop her political convictions and perhaps participate in political activity herself. She later credited Nottingham with providing the inspiration for her activism in 1823 in a letter of thanks to the group of supporters meeting in a room at the Sir Isaac Newton.

Susannah married William Wright in Southwark in 1815 and lived there having 2 children. When Richard Carlile, himself a radical bookseller and advocate of universal suffrage and press freedom, was arrested and imprisoned for blasphemy along with his wife and sister; Susannah ran their print shop at 55 Fleet Street and kept the publications flowing. However, she too was arrested in 1821 and charged with blasphemy. She was indicted with being: 'an evil disposed and wicked person, and with 'disregarding the Laws and Religion ...'

Susannah conducted her own defence, asserted the right to free expression, the separation of church and state, the iniquity of common law as 'whim, caprice and tyranny,' and the right of the people to make the laws of the country. Her defence lasted four hours with many interruptions from the Judge and account of her trial was later published by Richard Carlile. The packed jury returned a verdict after conferring for just two minutes and she was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment, a fine of £100 and £200 sureties for good behaviour. She was sent to Cold Bath Fields prison, Clerkenwell where her health and that of her third child who shared her cell suffered. This was reported in Nottingham Journal, 22nd February 1822. Fearing she might die the Lord Chancellor, and Peel, the Home Secretary released her. After her release Susannah remained in London with her family, but her husband William had

also been unwell and he died in January 1826 at the age of 39 and after that she returned to Nottingham.

Richard Carlile inserted a notice in 'The Republican' in July 1826: 'Mrs Susannah Wright, now a widow, a native of Nottingham, will supply any persons in that town and neighbourhood with my publications, or with London publications....'

Susannah lived with her mother initially in Kid Street and she opened a stall in the Tradesmen's Mart on Parliament Street, moving on to her new shop in Goosegate on 31st July 1826. Her enemies were waiting for her. In the afternoon her shop sign was delivered and her landlord objected to it being displayed, saying he would go to the Mayor if she put it up. She told him he was 'a foolish man' to be looking for support in that quarter but he went to see the Mayor. The story is recorded in 'The Republican' 11 & 18 August 1826 and reported in the Nottingham Mercury. The siege of the Goosegate bookshop lasted four weeks. On Tuesday 29th August 1826 Susannah wrote: 'My shop was broken open five or six times on Monday night, with several attempts to drag me out, which certainly would have been done but for my friends. The Christians got so furious, between nine and ten o'clock, that we found it necessary to call in the police. She didn't press charges against the men who had broken into the shop but persuaded the magistrates to bind them over to keep the peace and she kept a pistol under the counter. 'Two youths came in and began to use the most dreadful language. I took up the pistol and very coolly asked them if they should like it fired at them ... They did not stay but scampered off'. The magistrates and police officers she commended for their willingness to do their duty to protect her. Two weeks later she wrote to The Republican 'I have the pleasure to inform you, that the victory is ours.' If further proof were needed that the tide had indeed turned, she moved to larger premises further up Goosegate.

This is the last we know of her, did she stay in Nottingham or move away, remain a widow or remarry – these remain unsolved mysteries, along with the year of her birth and the place and circumstances of her move to London. Richard Carlile makes no mention of her during his time in Nottingham in 1828 and would surely have lodged with her or visited her had she still been living in the town. Of her brother there is no record after 1825. Her mother Sarah died in 1829 at the age of 57. Of her two children little is known apart from their names and there is no trace of them in later UK census records. ■