

ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS

In the run-up to the English Civil War in 1642, there was a breakdown in the authority of Charles I. This led to a great relaxation of censorship and many pamphlets appeared serving up controversial domestic news and political gossip. They also promoted rising political activism and became the voice of organizations like the Diggers, the Levellers, and the Ranters. They started to look like newspapers, featuring headlines to make stories feel more important and woodcut illustrations. Nevertheless, this early flowering of proto-journalism was quickly stamped out by Oliver Cromwell after his Roundheads seized power and imposed their strict Puritan regime, which believed that having no published news made public control much easier.

The first real newspaper in England came after Cromwell had been deposed, when the restored Charles II and his court fled to Oxford in the autumn of 1665 to escape the plague in London. Wanting something to read and fearing that the somewhat unreliable news sheets coming up from London might be infected with germs, the court authorized the university, which had the technology and skills, to publish the Oxford Gazette. Borrowing the name from its Venetian forebears, it was a regular and reliable source of information. It proved a hit, so when the court moved