



WATFORD'S Printing Past NEWSLETTER

May 2014 | Volume I, No. 1



*documenting the social, aesthetic
technical and educational aspects
of Watford's printing past*



A JOINT INITIATIVE BETWEEN

The Typographic Hub at
Birmingham City University

Watford Museum

West Herts College

University of the Third Age



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WATFORD MUSEUM

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About the project

The history of printing in Watford is of international significance and merits the attention of a full-scale study. To which end, the Typographic Hub, Watford Museum, West Herts College and the U3A are working together to tell the story of Watford's printing past.

From the mid-fifteenth century when Hertfordshire issued its first printed book, to the late-twentieth century when Robert Maxwell's newspaper empire came to the region, printing has been the county's main industry. Printing in Watford started in 1817 when James Hugh Perry set up his press, and by the turn of the nineteenth century the town's printers had begun the work which was to make Watford into a major international printing centre, with the greatest concentration of printing in the world, employing an estimated 70% of the town's population. Printing has had a central place in the history of Watford and the town has had a formative influence on the history of the international printing industry.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 1 - Encourage research into and promote public knowledge and understanding of Watford's printing past.
- 2 - Cooperate with other organisations, societies and individuals to promote research into and public knowledge and understanding of Watford's contribution to printing history.
- 3 - Support the development of projects and other activities, which enhance knowledge and understanding of Watford's printing past.
- 4 - Disseminate a newsletter to maintain contact between interested parties.
- 5 - Maintain a website which draws attention to information about the history of printing in Watford, relevant research and activities, publications, primary sources, artefacts and places associated with the local printing trade.
- 6 - Facilitate contact and the sharing of information between members of the Project via activities and events.

The role of the U3A

Printing excavations at Watford Museum

For over a year now, a small group of volunteers of U3A members (from SW Herts and other local groups) have played a major part in the team that has been involved in the Watford's Printing Past Project. Their contributions to the work have been both many and various, and they have been instrumental in pushing forward the project. Some of the group have been involved in collating documentary evidence detailing the development of printing in the town, whilst others have worked with Watford Museum to review, identify and catalogue artefacts and equipment that has been donated to the museum by the local industry over a period of thirty years. After an initial survey of the galleries and archives it became clear the collection contained material of significance. There is still much work to be done, and if anyone would like to join the team, or would like to know more about the work being undertaken, then please contact either ROBERT TAYLOR of the U3A roberttaylor84@talktalk.net or LUKE CLARK at Watford Museum luke.clark@watford.gov.uk.

The Typographic Hub

Letting the heart lead

The Typographic Hub is a busy centre for the study of printing and typographic history. A constituent part of Birmingham City University, the Hub is directed by Professor Caroline Archer whose research interests span British printing from the eighteenth to twentieth century. Professor Archer, who is leading the Watford's Printing Past Project, is a native of the town and has a life-long, close association with printing and typographic education in Watford. Keen to see Watford recognized for its contributions to the industry, and with an interest that stems from personal connections with the town, Prof Archer would be pleased to hear from like-minds.
Contact: caroline.archer@bcu.ac.uk.

World War I

Printers' Roll of Honour

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, and across the country many events are taking place to commemorate the occasion. It is therefore timely to remember the contributions made by Watford printers to that conflict. Members of both the Watford Typographical Society and the Watford Master Printers Association joined the armed forces ready to fight in the war to end all wars. For those who survived, there was an official welcome home given by the town and trades associations at a formal reception held on 12 June 1920 in the Clarendon Hall. Amongst those in attendance were two printers C J Clark and J W Gibbs, both men had been awarded the French *Croix de Guerre* for having distinguished themselves by acts of heroism involving combat with the enemy sufficient to have been mentioned in despatches. Whilst seven of the returning printer-soldiers received British military honours, including: W T Baker, C J Clark, J Fox, F Knight, F W Ling, A F Rolt and C Turner. So important was the contribution of Watford's printers to World War I, that a carved-oak Roll-of-Honour was unveiled by the Rt Hon C W Bowerman MP, on behalf of the Printing Trades of Watford: this was received, on behalf of the town, by Councillor F J B Hemming, Chairman of the Watford Public Library Committee. For many years the Roll of Honour was on display in the Public Library, but it now hangs in Watford Museum for all to see and remember.

HOW YOU CAN HELP: If any of the names mentioned above, or those listed on the Roll of Honour are familiar to readers of this newsletter, we would like to hear from you. Alternatively, if you have any memories or memorabilia relating to the Watford printers or printing during World War I, do get in touch.



Watford's Private Presses

Passion not profit

Whilst Watford's contribution to the trade is usually seen through the lens of the big commercial firms such as Sun and Odhams, the town was home to a number of smaller, private presses producing work that fell outside the constraints of normal business operations and which printed work that had typographic merit and artistic integrity, which had been created to satisfy the proprietors interests rather than the customers demands. One of the most successful was the Taurus Press, started in 1959 by American advertising artist Paul Peter Piech from his home in Bushey. For ten years, Piech produced more than fifty politically orientated titles with striking illustrations and text cut from lino [above]. The Kit-Cat Press, run by Kenneth Hardacre, President of the British Printing Society, from his workshop at Hunton Bridge was established in 1958. It was devoted to the production of ephemera on an Adana Eight-Five, but several small books were published, as well as a series of twenty-nine newsletters called *Christopher Cat's Commentary*. Material from the Kit-Cat press is in a private collection in Pinner. More information on Watford's presses will be given in subsequent newsletters.

HOW YOU CAN HELP: If you have any examples of printing from, or information on either the Taurus or Kit-Cat Press, or any of the other Watford private presses, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Exhibition

100 years of printing education

Running for three weeks from 28 January 2014, an exhibition was mounted at West Herts College, which was based on material resulting from the work of the Project. The object was to showcase some of the printed work produced by staff and students at the Watford School of Printing from its inception in 1911 when it was part of the School of Technology & Art in Queens Road, to its closure at the start of this century when it was the Department of Printing at West Herts College, Hempstead Road. To celebrate the occasion, a Private View was held on the evening of 30 January, which was attended by around 100 guests, including local VIPs, dignitaries from the USA and many others associated with printing and printing education in Watford. This exhibition marked the start of a research project, which is considering Watford's contribution to printing education: there is still much more to be done!

HOW YOU CAN HELP: Were you a student, lecturer, technician or member of staff in the Department of Printing? If so, do you have any examples of work produced by the Department? Photographs? Documentation? Or simply memories you would be willing to share with the Project?

Get involved

Anyone can get involved with the WATFORD'S PRINTING PAST PROJECT. If you want to lend a hand, contact us using the details overleaf.