*Two Hundred Years of Printing, 1816-2016.*

***THE RISE AND FALL OF EUROPE'S PRINTING CAPITAL.***

It is two hundred years since the establishment of the first printing works in Watford, and this exhibition aims to outline the history of what was once the most important industry in the town and the major source of the town's prosperity.

*Why did the town become a major centre of the printing trade?*

It is difficult to answer this question with certainty, but the members of the Watford's Printing Past Research Group feel that it is due to three reasons:

1. The ready availability of inexpensive, machine-made paper from five nearby mills in the valley of the River Gade.
2. The town's distance from the capital meant that printing employers did not have to pay London wages to their workers.
3. Paradoxically, the town's proximity to London made for easy communication between printers and their customers—publishers and advertisers--in the city.

These reasons, important at first, became less so as transport and communication became easier and more paper was imported, particularly from Scandinavia.

With the setting-up of Sun Engraving just after the First World War, Watford suddenly found itself to have a single-industry employer with around a thousand workers. This grew to around 3,000 in later years. It was the arrival in the latter half of the 1930s of Odhams (Watford) ltd:- ultimately employing about the same number as the Sun:- which gave Watford its 'printing capital' soubriquet. It was this newcomer which was, many people think, ultimately responsible for the industry's almost complete extinction in the town.

**Some facts and figures**

In the 1930s, about 1 person in 13, or around 8% of the population of the town worked in the industry—this is 8% of the entire population; it would be a much higher percentage of the working population only!

1938 There were approximately 2,000 employees at Sun Engraving. This figure had doubled in twenty years. In the same year, this factory was producing 6,000,000 weekly magazines, 2,500,000 monthly publications and a further 6,000,000 quarterlies and 'one-offs'.

1951 This year's census showed 6,212 people working in the printing industry;

4,960 men, 1,252 women.

1961 The number of print workers in Watford had grown to approximately 7,200;

* 3,500 at Sun Engraving,
* 2,500 at Odhams (Watford) ltd.,
* 700 at Mayflower Press,
* 130 at Stone & Cox,
* 100 at C. H. Peacock (Watford Observer),

plus other smaller shops.