WPPRG Exhibition; No. 11

Despite the prosperity of printing workers, the industry was beset with industrial unrest in the 1950s and 1960s. Contentious issues included the introduction of a nationwide forty hour working week-----already enjoyed by many in Watford-----the advent of photo-typesetting, and manning disputes regarding new machines. There were also problems with over-staffing, particularly on highly productive new techniques.

These disputes were very disruptive and caused the loss of many millions of copies, to the dismay of publishers and advertisers, who were seeing circulation figures fall alarmingly.

At this time offset-litho was starting to take contracts away from gravure printers. This is a faster production method and more economically suited to the reduced circulations of many periodicals. The oil crisis of the early 1970s, caused by conflict in the Middle East, gave added impetus to this flight from gravure:- the ink used for gravure printing required large quantities of oil, which suddenly became a lot more expensive!

In 1981, Robert Maxwell became the chief executive and part-owner of the British Printing Corporation, by then the owners of Sun Printers. In spite of a lucrative new contract to print the

SUNDAY EXPRESS colour supplement, Odhams lost £5.5 millions in that year and made many workers redundant; disaster loomed!

PICTURES HERE OF ROBERT MAXWELL

AND OF 'SUNDAY EXPRESS' MAGAZINE, VOL.1, NO.1.

At the end of 1982, Maxwell paid the International Publishing Corporation £1.5 millions for Odhams, including all machinery, real estate and contractual obligations, and the factory was closed by September 1983. Odhams contracts were shared out amongst the constituent companies of BPC, and about four hundred workers transferred to Sun Printers (renamed Odhams-Sun) in

Whippendell Road. Several times this number accepted voluntary redundancy, some of them leaving the industry for ever.

Early in the following year, Maxwell and the management of Odhams-Sun took the decision to install web-offset litho technology and two Baker-Perkins G16 presses were installed in the Ascot Road paper warehouse

Two years on, in 1984, Maxwell purchased Mirror Group Newspapers, an event, ultimately of great importance to the town.