The two major industries in Watford have traditionally been printing and brewing. During the 20th century, printing overtook brewing as Watford’s main trade. In the 1930s around 8% of the population of the town worked in the industry By the 1960s, thousands were employed in the industry, especially at Odhams and the Sun Engraving Company, owned by Robert Maxwell.

Printing in Watford had been established in the town by John Peacock, who was a bookbinder and opened a printing works in the Lower High Street in the 1820’s.

In 1817 the inventor of the Columbian press, George Clymer, moved to London from Philadelphia, USA. His printing press proved very popular, being the first iron hand press in the New World and the first press to discard the screw; instead employing a cleverly balanced system of levers and counterweights. The model we have in Watford Museum is numbered ‘47’ and was made in 1820. This makes it a very early example of a press that was to become the maid of all work for the printing industry of the 19th century. As Far as we know it is one of the earliest Columbian presses still in existence.

The complete history of No. 47 is not known, but it probably came intot the possession of John Peacock fairly soon after he opened his printing works. We do know it was definitely used on Saturday 24th January 1863 by Samuel Alexander Peacock to print the first edition of the Watford Observer. It continued to print the observer for two years until growing circulation.

Samuel Peacock saw that the town was growing because of the new Railway but realised that the town was lacking a newspaper. His Vision was to provide Watford with reports of the courts, civic events and affairs, religious and scientific meetings, political issues and overseas news. The four-page newspaper, called The Watford Observer and General Advertiser for Watford, Bushey and Rickmansworth, was intended to be a paper for the people and by the people. More than a century later, this sentiment holds true.

In those days, almost all small weekly newspapers were printed in London. Three pages of the four pages of the Watford Observer were produced in the capital and were transported to Watford. These contained the week’s general news, political and foreign affairs. The front page, with local news, court reports, parish affairs and general advertising, was produced at the paper’s Queen Street ( now Queens Road) offices on No.47. Every week, until 1880 when the paper was printed entirely in Watford, there was a period of tension before the pages from London arrived in Watford: would they be delivered in time for press day?

A cylinder printing machine was introduced in 1865 to speed up production and, by 1866, the circulation increased to include Hemel Hempstead, Harrow, Kings Langley, Aldenham and St Albans.

By 1896, the paper had been expanded to eight pages and the following year the Herts Leader was bought and absorbed. In December 1902 the Berkhamsted Times, Tring Telegraph and Chesham News were incorporated and the title of West Herts and Watford Observer was adopted.

The company moved to 101 High Street, Watford, where it remained until 1961 when the printing works was transferred to premises in Rickmansworth Road where it was based until 2002.

The growth in The John Dickinson and Co. Print Mill beside the canal at Croxley that manufactured the Croxley brand of fine quality paper gave a local source of paper to the [printers in Watford](http://printrepublic.co.uk/).  Wood pulp from Scandinavia was brought up the Thames and then along the canal to the paper mill.

<http://printrepublic.co.uk/history-of-watford-printing-companies/>