LITTLEJOHN PROOFING PRESS FOR SALE

John Woodwark

Version 1, 9 January 2026

This PDF document describes the Littlejohn proofing press that I am offering for sale. Please click on the links in the text to view pictures (3000 x 4000-pixel images located on my website) of the press and its accessories.

As I understand it, this flatbed offset lithography press was designed to make proofs from zinc plates, up to Crown size (20" x 15"). I believe that zinc plates can still be obtained, but these days polyester plates are more practical, cheaper, and readily available (e.g. from Polymetall). You can draw on these plates using nothing more exotic than permanent markers such as Sharpies, and then print the image lithographically.

I have owned this press for about 20 years. I bought it from an arts cooperative in Cardiff, and they said that it had originally been in a college of printing (which seems likely). It looks to have been generally well maintained, with little to no rust on the machined surfaces, although I have had to sort out a few mechanical issues.

I am asking £2,500 for what is now a most unusual press.

Payment can be made by bank transfer or Paypal, or I will accept cash on collection.

Dimensions of the press

Platens: 15¼" x 20¼" (Crown)
Overall length: 57½"
Overall width (excluding handle): 34" (with handle): 39½"
Height to platens: 36"
Overall height: 42½"

These measurements should be reasonably accurate; but if any measurement is critical, I suggest you ask me to check it.

Description of the press

This Littlejohn press has a substantial bed supporting two platens with their long sides parallel. A zinc or polyester plate goes on one of these platens, and the paper goes on the other. The plate is dampened and then inked. A roller, wrapped tightly in an offset blanket, is cranked by hand across both of these platens. It picks up the image from the plate on the first platen, and deposits it on the paper on the second platen. The roller can then be cranked back to its initial position. During this return movement the roller is automatically aligned so that the gap between the ends of the blankets faces the platens, so that the roller clears both platens on its return journey.

The roller runs on two machined tracks, and pinions driven by a handle engage with racks next to each track. At the end of each track are two sprung end-stops which eliminate jarring when the roller reaches the end of its travel.

I do not know what mechanism was originally provided to secure the zinc plates. Whatever device was used, it is missing. I expect that the previous owners taped down their plates. That would work,, but I have constructed a clamp which attaches to two studs that emerge from the end of the first platen. It will secure a polyester plate on a backing board of reasonable thickness. (I recommend using a waterproof board -- e.g. UPVC sheet -- which covers the whole of the platen, so as to keep the acidic fountain solution away from the machined surface.)

The paper is secured by three fingers which are released by a pedal. I have refurbished this mechanism and it now works correctly. There are four tapped holes in the second platen, which I assume were used to provide some form of longitudinal registration for the paper. I have used machine screws and washers to provide a simple way of doing this.

There is a fibreglass tray for fountain fluid and a sponge at the end of the press, beyond the platen which carries the plate.

I have made a substantial plywood worktop to go over the press when it is not in use. A similar board goes over the struts which connect the sides of the press near the floor. This can be used for storage.

Raising and lowering the platens

At the each corner of each platen is a screw. These eight screws adjust the height of the platens. I was told that the former owners of the press did not use these screws: instead, they used packing to raise the plate and the paper to printing height. This is clearly not how the press is intended to be used. However, I see why they did it: raising the platen

using the corner screws by trial and error is slow work, and hasty adjustment risks wrecking a blanket.

So I constructed a height gauge. This can be calibrated using one of the tracks, after which it is placed across the bed, with one end on each track. (The underside of the gauge is shown here.) Then the dial-gauges indicate the height of each side of the platen above the tracks, and it becomes relatively easy to raise each platen to the desired height. (By noting the dial-gauge readings, a satisfactory height can easily be repeated.)

The eight screws which raise the platens are in good condition (presumably because they have not received a lot of use). I have cleaned off any burrs and adapted a good quality military-pattern screwdriver for turning them: its blade fills the grooves on the screws, while cutouts clear the rail supporting the paper clamping fingers.

(N.B. Do keep the screwdriver sharp and look after the screws! They are quite complicated and would not be cheap to replace.)

Modification

After I bought this press I decided to have the underside of the platens reground, to increase the clearance between them and the roller. (The aim of this was to print on glass, a fascinating possibility which I'm afraid I never got round to pursuing. It should be possible....)

Unfortunately the firm who did this job turned out to have a surface grinder which was not large enough to resurface a platen in one pass; so they took two passes. As a result the platens to not quite sit down on the base when the screws are all unwound. Obviously this could be rectified permanently by regrinding, or temporarily with shims. But in any case it is not an issue if the screws are used to raise and lower the platens.

Collection

I'm afraid that I cannot offer to deliver this press. You might wish to use a competent machinery moving firm to collect it; and if you are collecting it yourself you will need to make appropriate arrangements. I reckon it weighs something approaching half a tonne, but I do not have an accurate figure for the weight.

I collected this press from Cardiff in a VW Golf Estate. (I don't expect you to believe this -- it seems incredible to me now....) I would not suggest that anyone attempts such a foolhardy feat. You will need a large SUV or, much better, a medium-sized van.

The press cannot be moved without dismantling. (For a start, it would not go through the door of my studio.) It divides into six main components:
1-2. The two platens
3. The bed
4. The carriage and roller assembly
5-6. The two side frames

Pretty much everything is made of cast iron. The bed is the heaviest component. I have moved this with another man at the other end -- but I could not do that now.

Access to my studio from the road is paved and essentially flat. A stout sack truck is available. A furniture dolly would also be very handy.