

NOSTALGIA

# The History of Nicholls & Janes

WE have previously considered the history of Nicholls & Janes (N&J) up to 1913 when the Wycombe Lock-Out began on November 29th. This involved chair-makers who were Union members being locked out by their employers, which included N&J. We now continue the story.

With Christmas fast approaching great hardship was now being experienced by the men and their families. This extended to many of the shops, pubs and cinemas whose trade depended on their custom. Soup kitchens financed by fund-raising activities and charities were set up to feed the children. Prominent among these charities was the Salvation Army who from its own funds provided many hundreds of hot meals and bowls of soup. The Union's Strike Committee formed the Wycombe Lock-Out Brass Band, who gave impromptu concerts in many of the major cities

throughout the country when the audience were invited to throw money into large tarpaulins.

As the dispute dragged on prominent local citizens attempted to mediate but were not successful. The Mayor, Councillor John Gomm who had been a member of the Federation when he took up office, resigned from that body. He established a Relief Fund for the children and one of the first donations was £100 from Lord Rothschild, the Lord Lieutenant of the County.

The bitterness grew and incidents of civil disobedience began to occur. The authorities viewed this with increasing alarm and arranged for extra police, including mounted policemen, to be drafted into Wycombe from the Metropolitan area. Inevitably this was seen by the Union as a provocative act and increased their determination not

to be subdued. The Union Strike Committee agreed to sponsor an 'anti-violence brigade' to keep a check on their members.

One way for the workers to escape the strike was to move away from High Wycombe and take their skills to other chair-making centres elsewhere in the country. It has been estimated that some 200 hundred men and their dependents, probably 500 in all, left to work mainly in Manchester and Scotland.

Eventually in February 1914 serious negotiations began and a settlement was finally announced on February 13th. Although the employers claimed 'victory' the Union did gain one important concession. This was a Code of Conduct binding on both employers and employees which provided the means for regulating wages to accommodate future changes in circumstances, including the cost of living.

At N&J any residual bitterness from the strike was soon to disappear and the Directors arranged the normal annual outing on Saturday June 20th, when over 70 employees were taken out in three 'char-a-bancs'. They toured South Bucks and South Hertfordshire, admiring the local scenery, stopping for lunch at the historic Kings Arms Hotel in Berkhamsted and dinner at the George & Dragon Hotel in Princes Risborough. After dinner they were entertained by a musical interlude given by members of the staff, including a duet of songs by Ralph Janes ! It was agreed that "it was the best outing in the history of this old established firm."

The shadow of war was looming ever larger and by August 1914 the country was at war with Germany. N&J, like all factories in Wycombe and



**Some 20 men are standing around a trestle table on which are laid a number of fish. They are furniture workers who were locked-out by their employers and the fish stall was run by Joshua Wiltshire for their benefit, 1913/14. (Kindly loaned by David Wiltshire)**

throughout the country would have been immediately affected by many of their workforce, particularly the younger men without family responsibilities, volunteering to serve in the military. This loss of manpower in the factory would have continued at a reducing pace throughout 1915 into the early months of 1916 as men continued to volunteer.

Then when conscription was introduced in March 1916 regular appeals to Industrial Tribunals would have taken up the time of the employers. They needed to attend the meetings to plead that their workers was essential to the work of national importance which the factory was undertaking. For example in February 1917 N&J were successful in getting the Tribunal to grant three months exemption to one of their band sawyers William Ayres.

Ayres was aged 30, single and lived with his widowed mother in Wycombe Marsh. Mr R A Janes had to appear in person to say "The firm were doing Government work and had only 48 men left out of over a hundred who were working at the

factory. The others had joined the colours. They had only one other band sawyer in addition to the applicant." The exemption was granted despite the objections of the Recruiting Officer, who represented the Military authorities. A further three months exemption was granted to Ayres in April 1917. It is known that in the latter stages of the war the company was engaged in 'aeroplane work' and in January 1918 permission was granted for temporary buildings to be erected in St Mary Street.

During the war Ralph Janes held a commission in the Royal Defence Corps. This was formed in March 1916 to provide troops for security and guard duties within the United Kingdom. The duties included guarding important locations such as ports or bridges and providing independent companies for guarding prisoner-of-war camps. Members were not employed on overseas service.

**To be continued**



**The High Wycombe Lock-out Band, formed from furniture workers who were locked out of factories by their employers for going on strike, 1913/14.**

## Food: Beer, Bacon Badgers and Bhajis

THIS new exhibition which features both traditional and new food available in the district begins tomorrow, June 24th, at Wycombe Museum and will run until early 2018.

The exhibition celebrates everything edible and delicious in Wycombe District from Prehistory to the present day. Find out what our ancestors ate, what foods are grown and produced in the area, how table manners have changed throughout history, and all about local specialities such as Bucks bacon badgers and lardy cakes.

The exhibition has information on: food produced in Wycombe District, including by farming, and by factories and small scale local producers,

food production and rationing during the World Wars and home-grown produce today, old cookbooks and recipes,

new settlers and the ingredients they have brought us – from 'What the Romans did for our food' to modern settlers and the changes they have brought to our diets

table manners and how they have changed over time, or 'Table Manners for the Time Traveller'

There are plenty of food related artefacts on show, including items from the museum's collections as well as loaned objects – everything from Roman pots to modern cooking pots from Pakistan, to delicate Georgian tableware, to retro-Tupperware.

Hands-on activities for all ages and photographs evoke the shopping streets of days gone-by from across Wycombe District. An Asian women's group, the Dosti Ladies (who meet at the Museum every Tuesday morning ) and people from the Caribbean who attend the Hairoun Day Centre have kindly shared their food stories. And with lots of hands-on activities teaching you what a healthy plate looks like and in which countries it is polite to burp and slurp, there really is something for everyone!

**FROM 24 June until early 2018. Free entry. Also visit the new museum café and shop and refurbished permanent galleries.**



**Members of High Wycombe Lock-out No. 3 station pickets, assembled on the Recreation Ground, West End Rd, High Wycombe. January 1914.**

**TO remind ourselves of the progress of the World War I, we are detailing the main events affecting Great Britain which took place each week. In the week up to June 22nd:**

**On June 16th Private Robert Ayres from High Wycombe was killed in action at the Western Front.**

**Riflemen Robert C James from Marlow and Reginald E Metzner from High Wycombe, and**

**lance Corporal James H Wheeler from Woburn were killed in action at the Western Front on June 17th.**

**On June 18th Private Harold L Priest from High Wycombe was killed in action at the Western Front.**

**Private Thomas R Deane from Bourne End was killed in action at the Western Front on June 22nd.**