

## NOSTALGIA

# 'The summit of the cabinet-makers art'

By Mike Dewey

WE have previously considered the history of Nicholls & Janes (N&J) up to 1918, including the Wycombe Lock-Out in 1913/14.

This involved chair-makers who were Union members being locked out by their employers, which included N&J. We now continue the story of the company.

More industrial unrest broke out in the April of 1919, but this involved a national strike rather than the purely local one in 1913/14. The strike was to last 5 months, causing more hardship to the men and their families, finally ending in November 1919.

There was relatively little civil unrest in High Wycombe, but in an incident in September factory windows were broken, including in that of N&J.

In the 1920s Ralph Janes' two brothers Maurice and Stewart joined him in the management of the company. The products of the firm were described as "wonderful reproductions, the summit of the cabinet-makers art", these including items for Masonic and Public buildings.

Early in June 1924 the Bucks Free Press reported that "Ralph Janes had received a personal letter from Queen Mary, in which Her Majesty says: "It is with the greatest pleasure that I say Thank You to all the kind people who have helped to make the Doll's House the most perfect present that anyone could receive".... N&J had been honoured to be the only company to be asked to manufacture items of miniature furniture for the Dolls House, which was displayed at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley with the aim of "raising funds for the many charitable claims that I [that is, Her Majesty] have at heart".



Nicholls and Janes stand at the British Industries Fair, which is being viewed by King George VI, Birmingham. March 1939

Accompanying the letter from Queen Mary was a Royal Command that "Mr Janes should, at any time, be admitted to the Queen's Dolls House in the Palace of Arts at the British Empire Exhibition."

The accolades for Ralph Janes continued when he was elected Mayor of High Wycombe for the year 1925/26. He was invited to continue for another two years until 1928. He had been first elected to the Town Council in November 1911, before retiring in 1921.

During this seventeen year period he had served on several of the most important committees. These included the Public Works Committee, of which he was Chairman for two years. Only three months after retiring from the Council in 1921 he was

persuaded to stand again, to represent the West Central Ward, which he did until his death over 30 years later. He was elected an Alderman in 1928.

In May 1934 N&J presented a portrait of the co-founder of the company Allan Janes to Wycombe Museum. From at least 1936 the firm exhibited at the British Industries Fair (BIF). The first of these Fairs had been held in 1915 at the Royal Agricultural Hall, London, in an attempt to encourage British firms to produce goods which had traditionally been imported from Germany and other countries.

Only the exhibition of British goods was permitted and a total of nearly 34,000 attended. The success of the first Fair led to further Fairs

being held in 1916 and 1917 at the Victoria & Albert Museum, and in 1918 and 1919 at the London Docks. A selection representing British heavy industries was inaugurated at Castle Bromwich in Birmingham in 1920 with the London section continuing at Crystal Palace.

A Board of Trade Committee of Inquiry then recommended that the Fair be maintained on an annual basis with one section in London and another in Birmingham. The purpose of the Fair became 'to show the world the strength of British industry, the craftsmanship, the design and the quality that is implied in the words 'British Made'. From 1930 the London section was held at Olympia.

In 1936 N&J had "at the entrance

to their stand an Elizabethan panelled room, a striking example of the hand-craftman's work. There are Sheraton sideboards in mahogany and in contrast, modern dining room sets.... A most interesting exhibit complete with miniature table and sideboard of the Elizabethan period".

During her visit to the fair in 1938 the Queen stopped at the N&J stand, saying to Harry Ralph Janes that she was not aware that such good work was still being done. She admired a reproduction of an "Adam chair", which was a perfect copy of an old model. The Adam style is an 18th-century neoclassical style of interior design and architecture as practised by three Scottish brothers, of whom Robert and James Adam were the best known.

The brothers were the first to advocate an integrated style for architecture and interiors; with walls, ceilings, fireplaces, furniture, fixtures, fittings and carpets all being designed by the Adams as a single uniform scheme.

Around this time N&J were advertising that church, ship and hotel contracts were a speciality. Advertisements also appeared in 1938 announcing the production of upholstery that was "a pleasing combination of modern effect with reproduction details" of superb quality. In November 1938 plans for new showrooms at the St Mary Street premises were approved.

For the British Industries Fair beginning on March 3rd 1939 N&J produced a brochure entitled "How Quality Furniture is made", with a picture on the cover of the firm's display at that year's exhibition. After another picture with the caption "His Majesty King George VI watching one of the last hand cane-splitters at work on our stand", was a series of pictures showing different craftsmen at work in the N&J workshops.

## Compair Broomwade



THIS picture has been sent in by reader Ken Allen. It shows the entire workforce of the Compair Broomwade factory at

Bellfields, High Wycombe in 1994. This was 8 years before manufacturing operations at the site finished in 2002.

The faces shown along the bottom of the picture are employees who were not on-site when the photograph was taken.

### Great War timeline

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 July 20th:

ON July 14th Private Sidney A Fountain from Tylers Green and Lance Sergeant William J Stone from Radnage were killed in action at the Western Front.

Privates Thomas Anderson from Stokenchurch and John Simmons from Turville were killed in action at the Western Front on July 15th.

On July 17th Privates Joseph Hopcraft from Monks Risborough and George Patey from High Wycombe, and Captain Francis H Nash from Lane End, were killed in action at the Western Front; Privates Albert G Phillips from Great Kingshill, and William Varney from High Wycombe were killed in action in Mesopotamia.

On July 18th Britain began an artillery bombardment prior to the forthcoming offensive at Passchendaele, for the Third Battle of Ypres. Around 1,400 guns

unleashed high-explosive and gas shells on the German trenches and continued until the last day of the month. The barrage badly cratered the low-lying ground in No-Mans Land, which had a high water-table, and destroyed the natural and man-made drainage systems.

Also on July 18th Gunner William E Bird from Wooburn died in Mesopotamia.

The following day, July 19th, members of the Reichstag, the German parliament, passed a Peace Resolution, in an attempt to seek a negotiated settlement to end the war, by 212 votes to 126. This was however ignored by the German High Command and also by the Allies.

Also on July 19th Privates George Oakley from Marlow and Ernest R Syrett from Denham were killed in action, and Henry Evans from Iver Heath died of wounds, all at the Western Front.

■ Are you a relative? Get in touch by emailing [deweymiked@aol.com](mailto:deweymiked@aol.com)