

NOSTALGIA

Iconic town furniture company

By Mike Dewey

THIS week we continue our series of articles on the history of one of Wycombe's iconic furniture company's, Nicholl & Janes (N&J). We finished the previous article on July 21st with a look at the firm's participation in the British Industries Fair early in 1939, for which they produced a brochure entitled "How Quality Furniture is Made".

Shortly after the exhibition the traditional craft-based work of the company came to a sudden halt with the outbreak of the second world war. For the next six years many of the firm's craftsmen were drafted into the military and the nature of work at the factory changed to the manufacture of war-related items. This involved secret work for which prototypes were made.

Towards the end of 1945 the company were starting to engage in the production of furniture under the Utility Scheme. Items being manufactured included wardrobes, dressing tables, chests, tall-boys and bedsteads.

The Utility Scheme was introduced into Britain by the Board of Trade on 1st June 1941 to ensure that low and medium quality consumer goods were produced to the highest possible standards at reasonable prices. The Scheme applied to furniture and other consumer goods as well as clothes, and set maximum allowed retail prices. It was designed to cope with shortages of raw materials and rationing of consumption.

The Utility Furniture Scheme came into effect in 1942 and continued during post-war austerity until 1952. New furniture was rationed and restricted to newly-weds and people who had been bombed-out. It obviously had a major impact on Wycombe's staple industry and the job satisfaction of the town's craftsmen whose creative work was severely constrained. N&J were able to mitigate that by engaging in export work. For example they completed an order for the King of Saudi Arabia for chairs in Queen Anne style, carved in walnut and upholstered in leather. They were also involved in the refurbishing of the Queen Elizabeth liner.

In 1946 the firm was formed into a limited company, Nicholls & Janes Ltd, with Ralph A Janes as Chairman, and his sons Harry Ralph Janes and E R Janes as Directors. Ralph had bought the shares owned by his brother Maurice Janes. Regi-



Players and officials of Bristow Townsend and Nicholls Janes before the final of the cricket cup final, 1949

nald W Boreham was appointed Company Secretary. Reg was a local man, born in High Wycombe in 1896, who in the early 1920s became a prolific goalscorer for Wycombe Wanderers. He was the club's first player to be capped at international level.

After scoring 22 goals in 16 games in the second half of the 1919/20 season he signed amateur forms for the professional Football League team Notts County. However after three games he returned to the Wanderers and finished the season as the leading scorer, with 42 goals! After his international cap, awarded against Ireland on Nov 14th 1921, he signed as an amateur for Arsenal.

For the next two seasons he played regularly for them before returning once again to the Wanderers. In total he played 157 games for WWFC, scoring 141 times, before leaving them during the 1926/27 season, at the end of which he retired. In 1936 he returned to the Wanderers, not as a player, but as the Secretary of the club. He held this post for 13 years and died aged 69 in 1976.

N&J exhibited in 1947 at the first British Industries Fair after WWII. The following year the company were visited by a party of MPs and in 1950 by the Duchess of Kent.

As the Queen had done 12 years earlier the Duchess commented "I did not know that things like this were still being made", a reference no doubt to the firm's export work. This included work for Saudi Arabia, a bedroom suite in burr walnut for example.

To be continued

I am grateful to Rowland Janes who in March 2011 set up a website as a basis for ongoing research into the history of Nicholls & Janes, the furniture they made, and the people who made its reputation for quality products. Rowland allowed me to quote extensively from the website, and in return I hope I have been able to contribute to the recorded history of the company. If any reader has information or photographs about N&J please contact me on 01494 755070, email deweymiked@aol.com; or Rowland by email: info@NandJ.org.uk



Duchess examines work

FEEDBACK: Cosy Corner murder picture

THREE readers have been in touch to point out that the picture accompanying the article on August 11th about the brutal murder of William Dearlove in his shop at 'Cosy Corner' in Hazlemere in 1950 was misleading.

David Gantzel, the author of a book on the history of Hazlemere, clarified that the picture showed the men's hairdressing shop which was in fact situated on the opposite side of the road known as Sawpit Hill to Dearlove's general dealers' store. This was located about where the bus stop is now.

David Wiltshire remembers that Mr Dearlove's shop was constructed of corrugated iron and painted dark green, almost a khaki colour. Brian Lacey said that the shop had a display window on both sides of the door with a model of a helmeted soldier in a trench to the right side.

Brian also said that the article brought back memories for him as at the time he was a sixteen year old passenger in the family car returning from an evening out just before midnight and saw a figure in the shadows of the shop, a fact that they reported to the Police.

Does any reader have a picture of William Dearlove's shop, if so we would very much appreciate receiving a copy.

Please email Mike Dewey at deweymiked@aol.com or ring him on 01494 755070.

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 August 24th:

On August 18th Private John Wilkinson from Iver Heath died of wounds at the Western Front.

The following local men were killed in action at the Western Front on August 19th - Privates Jonah Britnell, George A Busby from Penn, Henry T Collins and James G W West from Marlow, Francis E Dukes from High Wycombe, and Joseph E Smith from Flackwell Heath.

The same day, August 19th, these men died of wounds - Private George Newell from West Wycombe died back in the UK and Privates Harry Newman from Iver Heath and Percy Powell from Hazlemere died at the Western Front; Corporal Alfred J Huggins from Iver Heath died at the Western Front.

On August 20th Sapper Walter H Hibbert and Private Alfred Wright from Penn Street were killed in action at the Western Front; and Captain William J Knox from Farnham Common died of wounds at the Western Front.

The following men died of wounds at the Western Front on August 21st, Private Ernest Green from Iver and Corporal William Higgs from Hedsor; and Sergeant Harold H Moores was killed in

action at the Western Front.

August 22nd was a fateful day for the people of High Wycombe & District when a total of thirty local men were killed in action or died of wounds at the Western Front, mostly serving in the Bucks Battalion of the Oxford & Bucks Light Infantry. The Battalion had moved to Abeele on August 15th 1917, then on to the Goldfish Chateau camp near Ypres.

On the evening of the 20th they advanced to the support line and had many casualties from shell fire. They spent the next day preparing for an attack on 22nd August to capture the enemy's position at Pond Farm, Kansas Cross, on the Winnipeg Road. The advance began at 4.45am and huge casualties were suffered from the machine gun and rifle fire from the defenders. Pond Farm was finally captured at 4.00pm, when the men were in the last stage of exhaustion. What remained of the Battalion then returned to their camp at Goldfish Chateau. On that one day a total of 11 officers and 338 men in the Battalion were either killed or wounded. A further 125 were missing. Of these, it was later established that 19 had been taken prisoner, the remainder were presumed to have been killed.

The local men killed were:

From High Wycombe - Privates Samuel Bowler, Frederick Bravington, Thomas J Daw, Walter Fletcher, Frederick W Gibbs, Charles H Higgott, Eric

Hodgkinson, Alfred D Page, Rupert Timberlake, Arthur Watkins, Ernest A Weaver and Albert V Woodley; and Sergeant Harry Stallwood. Also killed was Lance Corporal Cecil H Fisher from the Hampshire Regiment.

From Hazlemere - Private David Sturgess,

From Woodburn - Private Edward Rackstraw,

From Stokenchurch - Private John E Plumridge,

From Eton - Private Edward W Moseley

From Little Marlow - Private William Herbert and William J Easden

From Marlow - Private Robert W Crew and Lance Corporal Arthur W Crew, who were brothers, and Private George Burnham; Captain Hedley R Foster

From Lane End - Privates Frank H Gray and Major J Abbott

From Amersham - Private George J Castle

From Bledlow - Private Walter Bowler

From Chesham - Private John Adnitt

Gunner John N Brown from Naphill died of wounds at the Western Front

And from Great Missenden, Private Harold Patman of the Royal Berks Regiment was killed in action at the Western Front.

Also on August 22nd German aeroplanes raided Dover, Ramsgate and Margate. Twelve people were killed and twenty five injured.



Duchess of Kent arrives at Nicholls and Janes factory, February 1950