

Hard work for just a few pence

By Mike Dewey

IN the first part on March 24 of this account of the history of the iconic furniture manufacturer's Nicholls & Janes (N&J), we considered the early history from its formation in 1868.

The business first occupied workshops in the Newland area of High Wycombe, before moving in 1885 to new premises in St Mary Street, a street which at that time ran from the bottom of Marlow Hill to Pauls Row and the Guildhall.

These premises had been the location of a Wesleyan Chapel which was the first Methodist place of worship in High Wycombe.

It was opened by John Wesley himself in 1779. When first occupied by N&J the premises were owned by Lord Carrington, from whom they rented the site. However it was included in the auction of many of his Lordship's Wycombe properties held in the Wellington Room of the Red Lion Hotel on August 24th 1896. The premises were then sold "for £600 to Mr Janes, one of the present tenants". "Mr Janes" would have been Allan Janes, whose son Ralph was also working in the business at that time. There must have been a great family celebration that evening!

Many years later in December 1947, when he was interviewed by a representative of the journal *The Cabinet Maker*, Ralph remembered "The conditions under which we worked in those days makes me wonder what the modern workers



Allan Janes, who founded the company with his father-in-law Charles Nicholls

would have done about them. We had no artificial lighting and, except for the heat from the drying stove, we had no warmth at all in winter, though the hard nature of our work soon warmed us on the coldest day. We had no machinery except the sawmill, and this was only an upright horizontal affair, which was very crude compared with present-day machines."

Mr. Janes continued: "I wonder what would happen if the present-day workman was asked, as workmen were then, to carry all the

timber or other supplies into the factory and stack it, doing all this for no pay! Sometimes, if it was a very heavy load and the employer felt generous, they would get an order on the nearest public house for a pint of beer each, which then cost 2d. a pint. We were all expected to load the chairs [onto carts for transportation] when finished. This was arranged by dividing the men into gangs of anything from six to twelve and numbering them."

Continuing to reminisce Mr. Janes said that after a time some firms

installed gas rings with open burners, but the men had to pay 6d. a week for such a privilege. Paraffin lamps were also placed in some factories. The work people usually commenced at half past seven each morning. At ten o'clock they were given a ten-minute break for beer, and bread and cheese. The dinner hour was from noon to 1 pm, and tea was served while work still proceeded from 3.30 to 4 pm.

He also remembered "Some married women got work making

up chairs in their own homes, and it was a common sight seventy or eighty years ago [that is around the time he started work in the 1880s] to see women lugging home six or eight seats on one arm, with a large bundle of cane on the other.

The price paid for such work was from 2d. to 6d. per seat, and it was a quick worker who could finish even the commonest seat in an hour. In those days bow sawing, fret cutting, planing and morticing all had to be done by hand."

Among the prestigious contracts the company undertook around the turn of the 19th century was a "very handsome suite of carved oak chairs" for the Corporation of Windsor. The arms of the Royal Borough were carved in the centre of the back-piece of each chair, which had been designed by Ralph Janes. Charles Nicholls, the founder of the company with his son-in-law Allan Janes, passed away on June 13th 1902 aged 78. His health had been failing for some time and he had not played an active part in the management of the company for many years. His funeral was held at the Newland Chapel.

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 has 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 about N&J I would be grateful if they would contact me on 01494 755070, email deweymik@aol.com; or contact Rowland by email info@NandJ.org.uk

Snapper dies aged 94

BOB Mead, a photographer for the Bucks Free Press for more than 20 years, passed away on Friday, April 14 at the grand old age of 94.

Robert H Mead was born in High Wycombe in 1922. During the Second World War he served in the RAF and after his demob he got a job on a farm near Handy Cross.

This engendered in him a great love of the countryside and farming. He then moved to an agricultural machinery company in Lt Kingshill where he became particularly fond of tractors, and he learnt to plough. Later in life he joined a club for old tractor enthusiasts called the Rusty Club.

Bob always had a great interest in photography. In 1962 he decided to approach the town's well-known photographer Ron Goodearl for a part-time job. Ron, who was always a freelance photographer and worked extensively for the Bucks Free Press (BFP), agreed that Bob could work for him at weekends on a sub-contract basis.

Using a camera loaned to him by Ron, Bob's first assignment was a fete in Bradenham, after which he returned the camera to Ron who then processed the film. Ron sub-contracted more and more work to Bob, so it was necessary for him to set up his own darkroom in his house in Dashwood Avenue, a task with which Ron helped him.



Bob Mead

Around this time Bob joined the High Wycombe Film Society and assisted in the running of the club. He also took up painting and joined the Marlow Art Club. One member, who framed many of Bob's pictures, said that Bob sold the most paintings of all the members at the art club exhibitions.

In 1968 the demand for photographs by the BFP expanded greatly when the sister newspaper the Midweek Free Press was launched. In the 1970's Bob found it necessary to take on another freelance, Ann Priest, to whom he gave a lot of encouragement.

This was typical of Bob, as he took great satisfaction in helping anyone with whom he came into contact and who showed enthusiasm, whether it be in photography or painting.

When Ron Goodearl retired in the early 1980s the BFP editor Arthur Church offered Bob permanent employment with the newspaper as their first Chief Photographer. Bob himself retired a few years later in 1987, but this was only so that he could devote his considerable energy to his love of the countryside and capturing this in his photographs and paintings. He and his wife Olive moved to live in Booker, where Bob acted as a tutor to several people who wished to become proficient in water colour and oil painting, and also Japanese flower painting.

Even in his mature years Bob embraced new technology, for example making a video of a ploughing event organised by the Rusty Club which he set to music. This delighted the club members.

As late as last year 2016 he made a video at Ninneywood Farm in Great Kingshill, when he photographed the farmer and his wife with the cows and new calves.

Bob covered an era in which all press photography was with manual cameras and photographs were hand-printed in the darkroom.

Great War timeline

TO remind ourselves of the progress of the First World War, we are detailing the main events affecting Great Britain which took place each week.

In the week taking place up to April 27:

On April 21 Private Frank Bishop from High Wycombe was killed in action in Salonika.

The following day, April 22, Private Percy Ridgley from Saunderton died of wounds at the Western Front.

On April 23 Privates Lancelot H G Arnold from Coleshill, William Delderfield from Denham, Harry Harvey from High Wycombe, and Edward D Hull from Denham; Riflemen Frederick Heath from Chalfont, William J Joynson from High Wycombe, John Sandalls from Marlow, and Thomas Simpson from Iver; Lance Sergeant Albert Hull from Denham; Sergeant Ernest A Beeson from High Wycombe, were all killed in action at the Western Front

On April 24 Privates Frederick Busby from High Wycombe, Herbert Hickman from Bradenham, and George W Puddephatt from Chesham; Lance Corporal Thomas W Pratt from Chesham; and Corporal Frederick Janes from Lacey Green, were killed in action at the Western Front; and Private Fred Rixon

from Burnham and Lance Corporal Percy H Hunniwell, were killed in action in Salonika.

On April 25 Privates Bertie Barlow from Burnham, Alfred Rance from Chesham, and Harry Bunce from High Wycombe; Corporal Charles H Harrowing from Wooburn, and Reverend Basil J Gedge from High Wycombe were killed in action in Salonika; Privates Thomas W Burnard from Tylers Green, Frederick J Chitty from Iver and Captain Philip V Rose from Tylers Green were killed in action at the Western Front; Corporals Henry F Mitchell from Wexham and Reginald C W Selwyn from High Wycombe died of wounds at the Western Front; and Private Albert E Hine from Denham died of wounds 'at home'.

Private Frederick J Jacobs from High Wycombe and Captain Herbert G Waghorn from Chesham Bois were killed in action at the Western Front on April 26.

On April 27 Privates Sidney Allen from Sands, Ernest Bovington from Tylers Green and Isaac Menday from High Wycombe; Gunner Alfred G Tilbury from Hughenden; Corporal Samuel Dimmock from High Wycombe; and Sergeant Thomas W Tomlin from Gt Missenden, were killed in action at the Western Front.

■ Are you a relative? Get in touch by emailing deweymik@aol.com.