

## NOSTALGIA

# 'The Great Lock-Out'

By Mike Dewey

WE have previously considered the history of Nicholls & Janes (N&J) up to the death on June 13th 1902 at the age of 78 of Charles Nicholls, who founded the company with his son-in-law Allan Janes. This week we continue the story.

The work of the company featured heavily in an Arts & Crafts exhibition held in the Town Hall, High Wycombe in October 1908. The purposes of this exhibition were "To establish a closer connection between the School of Art in the town and the leading local industry; to stimulate the local art and craft work; and to encourage lads to avail themselves of the opportunities which the School of Art offers."

It was reported that "Nicholls & Janes had a fine lot of exhibits, which included a copy of an old-fashioned spiral-legged 'gate' table; a Charles II arm chair, beautifully and elaborately carved; specimens of a William & Mary arm chair and a reproduction of a similar chair, the original of which is in Gwydir Castle, the Welsh residence of Earl Carrington; a Queen Anne table; a Chippendale table and settee; a Hepplewhite toilet glass; and other interesting novelties".

It was around this time that relations between the factory owners and their employees were becoming strained. In January 1910 N&J found it necessary to place an advertisement in the local press denying that they had threatened to discharge an employee who voted for candidate Arnold Herbert rather than for Sir Alfred Cripps in the General Election of that year. A reward of £10 was offered to "whoever will prove who started this abdominal lie".

In August 1913, N&J took the opportunity to increase their presence in St Mary Street, High Wycombe by purchasing the premises of W. Hands & Son. This was just before the strained industrial relations with the workforce which existed in the town reached breaking point. Although all the talk nationally in 1913 was of the possibility of war, in High Wycombe this was overshadowed by the industrial unrest. Up until then wages and working conditions in the town's furniture factories had been controlled mainly by the fact that the industry was overwhelmingly the dominant employer in the town. Cooperation between the different owners ensured that it was not easy for their employees to move from one factory to another to improve their lot, and there was relatively little alternative employment available. Furthermore the new Trade Union movement was starting to flex its muscles. The unrest began with a low-key dispute over the rates of pay for certain types of work being carried out in two of three factories in the town. On October 31st 1913 thirty firms, including Nichols & Janes, sought to counteract the growing power of the Union movement by forming a Federation. This was seen by the workers as a provocative act and almost immediately a serious dispute broke out at the factory of Henry Goodearl & Sons in West End St.

The Union then made the next move by presenting the Federation with a schedule of wages. This introduced a new principle for the industry, which was that there should be only one wage for an hour's work in any of the different processes involved in the trade.

That meant for example, that a chair-



The Swan Hotel near corner of Paul's Row and White Hart Street, where the Union members met in November 1913. The picture was taken in 1965

maker employed on the production of simple wooden chairs for an army barracks should be paid the same as one employed in making high-class chairs. For many years the employers had paid two rates, 'Ordinary' and 'Wycombe' work, the latter always being lower as it involved simpler work than for 'Ordinary' work. The Federation not only wanted to keep this principle but even to develop it further. They produced their own schedule of wages, with two or three different hourly rates for different grades of work.

The Union men then met in the committee rooms of the Swan Hotel on November 26th and the Bucks Free Press reported the sight was "an eye opener". The hotel yard was packed by over 100 bicycles and upstairs the meeting room was crowded with men engaged

in earnest conversation on the matters which had brought them out.

It was a crowd of respectable, well set-up, energetic-looking men of various ages; and it seemed a pitiable thing that the cause of their congregation together was a dispute with their masters. I am informed that the local 'Union' is making new members at the rate of 400 a week."

As the dispute continued the patience of the employers whose firms were members of the Federation abruptly ended. They gave one hour's notice to all the Union men in their employ to accept the terms on offer or be prevented from working.

The Union refused, and so the great Wycombe Lock-Out began on November 29th 1913.

*To be continued*

## Night at the movies

On Friday, June 9 the Booker and District Local History Group have arranged a Film Night, which will be held at the Booker Memorial Hall and commence at 7.30pm.

The evening will start with a 'Gramo Lantern Entertainment', which was probably first shown in the Hall in 1920. This will feature photographs of Booker life around the time of WW1. This will be followed by a 2016 Bucks TV film of ceremonies marking the centenary of the death of L. Corp. William Pearce and films of the Booker area in the 1930s to 1950s. All are invited to attend. Admission is £3, including tea/coffee and cake. Speak to Roberta Wilson on 01494 447918 or robbrian@waitrose.com for more information.



## News in Brief

AN unusual ceremony entitled the Laying Up of Standards will be held in the village of Flackwell Heath on Sunday June 4th.

This will involve the Standards of two organisations which were associated with the Royal British Legion, but have now been retired.

The national body the Royal British Legion (RBL) was founded in 1921 as a voice for the ex-service community. It was formed by the merger of four organisations: the Comrades of the Great War, the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers and the Officers' Association.

This was followed by individual branches being established in the town and villages throughout the United Kingdom. Over the years these have thrived but inevitably some will fall into decline, often as members pass away and are not succeeded by new members.

This is the case with the Women's Section of the Flackwell Heath RBL Branch, and also with the Wycombe Branch of the Dunkirk Veteran's Association.

The Standards of both these organisations will be formally retired on June 4th. Wreaths will be laid at the War Memorial in Flackwell Heath at 2.00pm, and this will be followed by a service at Christ Church in the village.

The service will be conducted by the Rev. Christopher Bull, Vicar of Flackwell Heath, and also of the Flackwell Heath Branch of the RBL. He is also Bucks County Chaplain.

All are invited to attend this ceremony and service, after which a reception will be held at the RBL Branch Club in the village.



Rev Christopher Bull

## 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 June 1st:

On May 28th the American General John Pershing left New York for Europe with the first contingents of the American Expeditionary Force.

Lance Corporal Ernest J Ricketts from Loudwater was killed in action at the Western Front on May 28th.

On May 29th Sergeant Herbert J Vickers from High Wycombe died of his wounds at the Western Front.

Private Joseph P Lay from Beacons Bottom was killed in action at the Western Front on May 30th

On May 31st Private Sidney L King from Hughenden was killed in action in Palestine.

Private Ernest R Hailey from Prestwood was killed in action at the Western Front on June 1st