

## NOBEL'S EXPLOSIVES COMPANY LTD REGENT WORKS, LINLITHGOW

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### Pre 1914

Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833-1896), was a Chemist, Engineer, Innovator, Armaments manufacturer, inventor and philanthropist. He patented ballistite (1857) a forerunner of cordite (still used as a rocket propellant today), the detonator (1863), the blasting cap (1865) and in 1867 he invented dynamite, a substance easier and safer to handle than the unstable nitro-glycerine.

He established 90 armaments factories throughout the British Empire despite his belief in pacifism. There were three in Scotland; Ardeer in Ayrshire, Westquarter and Linlithgow in West Lothian, linked by the Union Canal.

The Regent Factory, designed by W M Scott in an unusual 'Italianate' style with towers and an open arcade, was constructed between 1901 and 1902 and officially opened on 16 September 1902 by Sir Charles Tennant, Chairman of the Nobel Explosives Company.

Named after James Stewart 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Moray, Regent of Scotland, assassinated in Linlithgow in 1570, it was sited at the end of High St bordered by Edinburgh Road and Blackness Road. *'Old Linlithgow'* by Bruce Jamieson, has some lovely old photos of the original buildings, "Middelraw", demolished to make way for the new factory and of the factory itself. Today its site is Tesco's supermarket and the Regent Square flats.

It began as a small wire-covering shop but was expanded for the construction of safety fuses, mining explosives and detonators to be exported worldwide. The safety fuse consisted of jute yarn spun round a core of black gunpowder and waterproofed by a coating of pitch and gutta-percha. White Countered Gutta-Percha Fuse, a speciality fuse made at the Regent Works was sold mainly to South Africa under the Nobel-Glasgow Empire Brand to meet Transvaal Government regulations. Another brand name was the Nobel-Glasgow Thistle Brand used for the Blue Sump Fuse for the Australian market and Rubber Felted fuse exported mainly to India.

There was misapprehension about Nobel's setting up an explosives factory in the town. Confirmation that the material, known as 'strum', to be manufactured was not an explosive in the strict sense of the word was published in order to allay the residents' fears. The new factory would manufacture safety fuses which, when lighted, burned without visible flame and were used in mining operations to light detonators or powder.

Published circa 1908, The Book of Explosives was produced at Ardeer and became the 'Standing Instructions' (recipe book) for all Nobel factories throughout the world.

In 1911 Linlithgow Town Council approved an application under the Explosives Act 1875, (the Act brought supervision of munition works under HM Inspectors of Explosives), from Nobel's to establish two mixing houses, a boiler house and an additional magazine at the Regent factory. Then in 1913 the council approved Nobel's application to amend the Licence for the factory to manufacture explosives at Boghall.

The Valuation Rolls for 1902-1914 showed the rateable value for Nobel's Explosives Co Ltd rose steadily from £522 to £850. Further development would raise this even further and increase the valuation of the district.