

NOBEL'S EXPLOSIVES COMPANY LTD REGENT WORKS, LINLITHGOW

August 1914

The county of Linlithgowshire saw little effect early on from the war other than some scarcity of labour as the men signed up and went off on what may have appeared an adventure, many fully expecting to be 'home by Christmas'. The oil works, one of the major employers and businesses in the area was hardly affected. Nobel's Explosives Company Ltd, Regent Works Linlithgow however started to gear up production and was exceptionally busy and working overtime. When war was declared Nobel's was one of only 16 firms who tendered for the War Office contracts to provide guns, shells, small arms and ammunitions. The number would increase as the war became more industrialised.

Employees from the factory collected £15 19s 6d for the local Relief Fund and pledged to make weekly contributions until the end of the war, allocating contributions to the National Relief Fund, the Red Cross Society, the Sailors' and Soldiers' Families Association and to the Belgium Relief Fund.

On 8th September Mr William Muir, manager of the Regent Factory received a letter from Lord Kitchener. It was a 'rallying call' asking the company and its employees to put every effort into their work for the good of those fighting. The contents of the letter were relayed to the work force and for good measure the letter was reported in the local press in full as follows:-

"I wish to impress upon those employed by your company the importance of the Government work upon which they are engaged. I fully appreciate the efforts which the employees are making, and the quality of the work turned out. I trust that everything will be done to assist the military authorities by pushing on all orders as rapidly as possible.

I should like all engaged by your company to know that it is fully recognised that they, in carrying out the great work of supplying munitions of war, are doing their duty for their King and country equally with those who have joined the army for active service in the field.

- Yours very truly,

(Signed) KITCHENER"

On Monday 2 October, a fire broke out at the works. Two loud bangs shook windows and doors in the vicinity and tongues of flame shot over the wood-work in the roof and sides of No. 3 spinning-room.

Elaborate arrangements were in place at the factory and iron partitions checked the spread of the fire.

The factory fire brigade and Linlithgow Fire Brigade turned out and tackled the flames and within half an hour they had the fire under control. The fire appeared to have been caused by a spark from machinery falling into the powder that trickled through tubes from the powder huts on the roof. Only a small quantity of powder was stored here, none of it highly explosive, but sufficient to explode with loud bangs and smashing the huts.

Unfortunately one of workers, Mr John Brown, who was working at the powder huts on the roof, received severe injuries to his face and arms but others in adjoining departments, got out immediately the alarm was raised and no one else was injured.

The factory was busy with Government orders and the accident regrettably would cause some delay. The damage however wasn't extensive and repairs would be completed quickly.

At the end of October the local newspapers reported that one of three Germans, Emil Selz, arrested at Annan had been an employee in the Regent Factory of Nobel's Explosive Company Linlithgow. No doubt great stories of spies and espionage abounded.

In October 1914, Nobel's purchased property at the south end of Provost Road behind the company's Regent factory. Nobel's now owned the entire ground between Bells Burn to the north, Edinburgh Road to the south and from High Street right back to Provost Road. A considerable extension of the factory was to be constructed and

work would begin immediately. The factory was seen as an asset to the burgh of Linlithgow providing employment for men, women and girls and this proposed further extension of the works would provide enormous benefit to the community.