

NOBEL'S EXPLOSIVES COMPANY LTD
REGENT WORKS, LINLITHGOW

1916

By the beginning of 1916 the war had escalated and the requirement for arms and munitions meant production at the Regent factory was at full throttle. The building extensions carried out to meet the ever increasing manufacturing demand and labour had increased the rateable value to £1050.

The staff and employees of the Regent Factory continued to be generous and in January a contribution of £315 12s 1d (£315.60p) was made to the Town Council's Accounts for War Relief. The war effort work of one employee in particular, the Rev. Johnston Oliphant, parish minister of Abercorn, was highlighted when an article appeared in local newspapers praising him for the munition work he was engaged on at the Regent Factory.

On 18 February 1916, the Town Council passed Nobel's submitted plans for the erection of two mixing-houses and two boiler-houses at Baron's Hill, and for the transference of a dressing-room.

The war was now in its second year and conscription (introduced in early 1916) and the continuous call for men was impacting on the district. Although some occupations such as farming, shipyards, coal mining and munitions were clearly identified as being 'Reserved Occupations', individuals in other occupations and trades could present appeal against conscription. Tribunals had been set up and the individual was required to put forward and prove their case. On 10 March 1916 Thomas Galbraith, motor hirer and repairer in Linlithgow, petitioned the Tribunal for exemption from conscription on the basis that three quarters of his work was for Nobel's, taking workers to and from Winchburgh, Philpstoun and other outlying districts and delivering goods for the factory. He produced a certificate from Nobel's to this effect; *'His services were indispensable to the factory as he conveyed 120 of their workers to and from the establishment each working day. Owing to railway congestion it was necessary for the applicant to convey their goods by motor.'* The Tribunal however ruled that his was not a key position and the work and business could be carried out by someone other than him. He was granted only a week's exemption 'to make the necessary arrangements connected with his business.'

The 1916 Irish Conflict brought regular police into all Nobel's factories including the Regent Factory and stricter employment rules were put in place. Military guards were also now used at a number of arms and munition manufacturers and West Lothian Constabulary had permanently posted two constables solely to Nobel's works, their services being paid for by Nobel's.

The demand for armaments put pressure on the workforce, and shift work and overtime became the norm. In April 1916 a committee from Falkirk United Free Presbytery Falkirk submitted a report for consideration of the question of munitions work on Sundays. The Committee reported that in general employers of labour in the neighbourhood were anxious to maintain the sanctity of the Sabbath in connection with all war work. The position the country was in at that time meant that employers and employees found themselves reluctantly compelled to Sunday work. The Presbytery agreed to overture the General Assembly to take steps to set apart a day of humiliation and prayer in the present national crisis.

Over the previous two years the factory workforce had more than doubled and now there were about

340 workers employed - about 240 girls and 100 men and boys. Many of the girls came from a distance of some miles - from Blackness, Causewayend, Manuel, Kingscavil, Bridgend, Philpstoun, Winchburgh and Niddrie. In addition a night shift of 15 girls with overseers was inaugurated in one of the spinning rooms and a finishing room in May 1916.

In July Daniel Green and Patrick O'Donnell, both labourers, were charged with having on 3rd July 'entered without permission upon the land immediately adjoining the Regent Factory, Linlithgow occupied by the occupiers of the said factory, contrary to the Explosives Act 1873'. They pleaded guilty and admitted it was due to their having a little too much to drink. The Fiscal, Sheriff MacLeod stated that the men had been in the habit of staying in the lodging house opposite the factory gate. Being the worse for drink they were not allowed into the lodging house and had apparently gone into the factory ground to lie down until they sobered up. Both had money to pay for lodgings so the Sheriff accepted they had no malicious intent in entering the factory grounds. The Sheriff declared the maximum penalty for such an offence was £5, but since this was a very small contravention he fined each £1.

Throughout the year the staff and employees continued to play their part not only in producing much needed armaments, they also regularly contributed handsomely to the various war charities. From January to December 1916 their contribution totalled £242 bringing the overall total to £500 since the outbreak of war.

Nobel's was a generous and considerate employer and staff and employees were only too ready to make time for former employees who had been injured doing their duty. The local newspaper reported one such event when Sgt W T Stirling of the Scottish Rifles, who prior to the war was an analytical chemist at the factory, had a very cordial reception from the officials and the workers in August 1916. Sgt Stirling had been wounded in France and was recovering from his injuries.