

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

1917

As the new year dawned trade at the Regent Works continued to be brisk with long hours, overtime and shift work.

In February Nobel's held the annual social and dance in the Victoria Hall, Linlithgow. The building was decorated with beautiful hothouse plants from the gardens of Clarendon and Rockville. Mr William Muir, the manager opened the event by outlining the remarkable progress and expansion of the factory. The Regent Works had become the leading industry of the town, employing a very large number of workers, from outside districts as well as within the burgh boundaries. The expansion had been greatly accelerated by the war and the main thrust was to produce everything necessary to bring victory soon. He noted that during 1915 Nobel's had paid around £20,000 in wages, and since the war began the employees had contributed some £500 to the various war charities. Nobel's had recently acquired £5,000 worth of the new War Loan Stock on behalf of the workers. The evening's proceeds were in aid of the Red Cross Funds. Mr Robert Blake, a local baker, provided a very satisfactory purvey [catering] and everyone enjoyed the evening's musical programme and dance.

In April the employees at the Factory, formed a War Savings Association, under the Burgh of Linlithgow War Savings Committee.

Sadly in April a former employee of the factory was reported killed in action in Mesopotamia. Pte Adam Easton aged 28 of the Seaforth Highlanders was well known and highly respected.

During May construction began on a new dining room and employees' recreation room where the High Port and the Low Port roads join at the east end of the High Street (opposite the Star and Garter).

To mark the birth of his son the employees presented Mr Muir, the factory manager with a silver rattle, other trinkets and a gold watch engraved "*To Master William Muir with the good wishes of the employees of the Regent Factory Linlithgow, 12 April 1917*". This was reported in the Gazette as a striking testimony to the good feeling which existed between Mr Muir and the employees. The whole company was photographed on the occasion and later Mr Muir entertained the employees to strawberries and cream with a musical programme and a dance on the lawn at his residence, Baron's Hill.

Sadly in August Nobel's were again notified of the death of a former employee while on active service. Mr and Mrs Robert Bateman, Avon Place, Linlithgow, had received official intimation that their eldest son, 20 year old Pte Robert Bateman, Royal Scots (attached to RSF), had been killed in action. Mr Bateman also received the following letter from his deceased son's Company Commanding Officer - "*Dear Mr Bateman, I deeply regret to inform you that your son was killed in action during the recent advance. We had a very hard job to tackle and your son was one of the splendid boys who helped us to succeed but was deprived of the satisfaction of knowing how well we had done. The whole company share with me in the sorrow for your great loss. Please accept our deepest sympathy. We hope that you will find something comforting in the thought that your son died like a man and a soldier. I am, yours faithfully, W M Tude, Commanding Company Officer*". Pte Bateman had been a member of the County Territorials when war broke out and had been on active service since then. He had been serving his apprenticeship as an engineer when mobilised and was 'a lad of fine disposition, much liked by all who knew him'.

In October 1917, Nobel's had submitted plans to further extend and improve the factory. The proposals were for a new recreation hall at the west end of the factory along with improvements to the entrance to the Low Port and the strip of loanings from Bellsburn Bridge to Fouldubs House. The Council were happy to approve the plans on condition that under the Town Councils Act 1900, a minimum feu (an old form of land lease in Scotland) duty of £2 was imposed, and on condition that the company pay all costs concerned for the advertisements, roup and feu charter. In addition a further condition was imposed and Nobel's were asked to agree to enlarge and widen the entrance to the Low Port. The extension would not only benefit the works, considered an asset to the burgh of Linlithgow, but would also provide a much-needed widening to the entrance to the Low Port.

Nobel's had a reputation as a caring employer, adopting the principle of Alfred Nobel the founder. Tuberculosis was a serious health hazard and a former worker, Helen Adamson, 232 High Street, was being assisted financially by Nobel's Explosives Company. Nobel's obtained a place for her in Quarriers Homes for Sanatorium Treatment but she had declined this offer and Nobel's meantime agreed to contribute 5/- per week till the end of the year. The Public Health committee made arrangements for her to receive additional food such as beef, eggs and milk to the value of 8s per week, and noted Nobel's assistance.

As in any workplace, rivalries and dislike brewed and one such hostility brought more serious consequences. Amelia Drummond, aged 17 years, munition worker, 66 Kingscavil, Linlithgow, was charged with having on 18th October at Old Kingscavil assaulted Sarah Ellen McGurk aged 16 years, munition worker residing at 21 Kingscavil Rows, by striking her on the body with her fists. Brought before Sheriff Macleod, Drummond pleaded guilty to assault but not to striking McGurk with her fist. Drummond stated that she had only caught the other girl by the wrists and shoved her. McGurk blamed Drummond for something which had been written about her which Drummond denied. Both were employed in Nobel's Regent Factory, and had evidently been at loggerheads for some time. The Sheriff sternly rebuked both girls and dismissed Drummond, saying he hoped this would end the matter.

By the end of October, staff and employees of Nobel's regent Factory, Linlithgow, had contributed over £760 to various war funds since the early days of the war. Among the institutions and funds which benefited were the Red Cross, Belgian Relief, Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association, and the Lord Roberts Memorial Fund.

On 22 and 23 November 1917 the staff and employees arranged performances of Donizetti's Opera, 'The Daughter of The Regiment' by Glasgow Grand Opera Society in the Victoria Hall in aid of the Scottish Red Cross Society, Jock's Box, and the Royal Scots POWs' Parcel Fund. Tickets were priced from one to four shillings. Special arrangements were made for the 9pm train from Linlithgow to stop at Philpstoun and Winchburgh so that the residents in these districts could attend the entertainment and reach home at a reasonable hour. A separate performance was also held in Bo'ness in aid of the Scottish Veterans Garden City Association. The opera was completely sold out and the three performances raised about £300.

At the end of the year the factory was notified that Pte John Gibson of the Highland Light Infantry, son of Mr John Gibson, 232 High Street, had been killed in action in Palestine on 8th November 1917. Pte Gibson age 19 was well liked and had just completed his apprenticeship as a joiner in the Regent Factory Linlithgow.