

## **BIRLEY'S MILL IS TO CLOSE DOWN**

### **END OF FAMOUS EARBY TEXTILE CONCERN**

Industrially, this has been another disappointing week for West Craven. On Friday, a letter to the workers at the firm of A. J. Birley Ltd., Albion Shed, told them that the firm is closing down with effect from May 1st. The firm, one of the oldest in the district, has been a pillar of Earby's industrial structure since the beginning of this century, and the fact that it is to close will be regretted throughout the area. About 140 workers will be affected.

Three days later, on Monday, Mr. F. Wilkinson, who combines the duties of clerk to Barnoldswick Urban Council and secretary of the Barnoldswick & Earby Joint Industrial Development Committee, announced that negotiations which have been taking place with a prospective industrialist will not come to fruition. The firm, Burco Dean Ltd., a nationally renowned firm of electrical appliance manufacturers, was the one referred to by Mr. G .B. Drayson, M.P. for the Skipton division, when he met the Development Committee last month.

The firm was contacted by Mr. Wilkinson following information he received from Mr. Drayson, and from another source, and representatives visited Barnoldswick and inspected Westfield Shed which of course is vacant. After very careful consideration, however, the head of the firm has told Mr. Wilkinson " with regret," that they are not in a position to expand in Barnoldswick.

#### **LETTER TO WORKPEOPLE**

The information to operatives at Birley's was given in the following letter, signed by Mrs. Blanche A. Brooks, of Thornton-in-Craven, who is chairman of the directors: "Dear friends,- Owing to the very adverse trade conditions and circumstances, absolutely beyond our control, Miss. Birley and I are compelled to close the mill."

"During our father's lifetime, and until his death in 1944, a happy relationship has always existed between all departments of the firm. Many of you have been with us all your working life since leaving school, so it is doubly painful for me to have to give you the grave news that A. J. Birley Ltd. will close down on May 1. I sincerely hope all soon find other suitable employment."

"May I take this opportunity of thanking you all for your loyal support in the past."

This announcement brings to an end a long and industrious family association dating back well over three hundred years. It was an ancestor of Mrs. Brooks' who made the sailcloth for the ships in which Sir Francis Drake sailed against the Spanish Armada.

It was in 1892 that the late Mr. Birley first began his business connections with Earby. At the age of 16, on the death of his father, he had to take on the family concern, at that time operating at Lodge Mill, Burnley, in the spinning section. Mr. Birley's great grandfather built that mill, and with it 60 houses and a shop to serve them, one of the earliest examples of what

is now done on trading estates.

### **BUSINESS PROSPERED**

Production in Earby began at Victoria Mill in the manufacturing side of the industry. So prosperous was the concern that when a new block was built, known as Victoria Shed, Mr. Birley placed 700 looms in it. Later he placed 400 looms in Albion Mill.

In 1906 the Burnley mill was burned down, but Mr. Birley took over the site and built a 1000 loom shed, which he sold shortly after the 1st World War. At one time he had 2,200 looms running in Burnley and Earby.

It was in 1932 that business was concentrated entirely at Albion Shed, and notwithstanding the bad trade between the wars, Mr. Birley's acute business sense enabled him to weather the many industrial storms of those troubled years. Indeed, his firm was regarded as a stabilising influence on the town in those years.

It is particularly ironical that this announcement should come at the present time, when Earby Urban District is preparing celebrations for its jubilee. Mr. Birley was the first chairman of the Urban Council in 1909, and had much to do with Earby's establishment as an Urban authority. Prior to his lengthy and valuable service for Earby council, the late Mr. Birley had been chairman of the Thornton Parish Council for a number of years. He was a Justice of the Peace for many years, and in this direction he was succeeded later by his daughter, Miss Birley, who also lives in Thornton-in-Craven.

### **TOWNS BENEFACTORS**

Earby has had no more generous benefactors than the Birley family. A permanent memorial will remain to them for all time in form of the Birley Playing Fields, given to the district by Mr. Birley in 1938, the year in which he and his wife celebrated their golden wedding. He also gave a piece of land which now forms part of the Skipton Road recreation ground, and had much to do with augmenting the fund which provided the first motor ambulance for the town. No doubt Mr. Birley's interest went back to the days when, as a talented footballer, he played centre half for Burnley F.C., and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to reminisce of great games against the Preston North End side, known as "The Invincibles."

Mrs. Brooks told a Craven Herald and Pioneer reporter on Monday that there was absolutely no plans for the future of the building.

This new development will further aggravate the unemployment situation which has already caused so much concern in West Craven. It is the first really hard blow to be struck at Earby, where only one or two comparatively small firms have closed, and most of the operatives have been absorbed elsewhere.

It will also mean that a second mill will, temporarily at least, stand idle.

### **BARNOLDSWICK MILL**

Hopes that the other, Westfield, Barnoldswick, might become occupied fairly quickly were dashed this week in an announcement made by Mr. Wilkinson. At the same time, there are

encouraging features in that case. Announcing that Burco Dean would not be coming to Barnoldswick, Mr. Wilkinson said, "It is naturally a great disappointment. Had they decided to come, it would have been a completely new industry for the area and would have employed a considerable number of people. But while we are disappointed, it must not be interpreted as despair.

"Indeed, the fact that we were successful in interesting this firm in our district has given us new encouragement, and our efforts will now be redoubled. I heard of the decision regarding the Earby firm of A. J. Birley Ltd., with profound regret. It is a sad blow to Earby, but the people of the district as a whole can rest assured that all possible is being, and will be done, to try and alleviate the position."

Burco Dean is not the firm dealt with in an exclusive Craven Herald and Pioneer announcement two weeks ago, that a firm had written to Mr. Wilkinson asking for details concerning sites and other services available in West Craven. Negotiations there are still proceeding, though very slowly, and are still at a preliminary stage. Further, it is understood that at least two other firms are making enquiries in to the industrial possibilities of West Craven, while the clerk this week wrote to yet another individual interested in branching out in a new line of business, following information given to him by a Craven Herald and Pioneer reporter.

### **CROW NEST FIRM**

Friday, too saw the final act in the death of another well known old established West Craven firm, A. & G. Carr Ltd., Crow Nest Shed, Barnoldswick. Like the Earby firm, they have been experiencing considerable difficulty in recent months, and the labour force had dwindled to no more than a handful. It was the fire at Crow Nest, however which spelled "closure" for that firm; immediately prior to that there had been some signs of an improvement in fortunes.

Again, like the Earby firm, A. & G. Carr was founded by an experienced man who took a keen interest in public life, the late Mr. Anthony Carr. The final "weaving out" had been foreshadowed for some time, and rumours of impending closure have been rife on frequent occasions.

### **IMPRESSED BUT . . .**

In a letter to Mr. Wilkinson informing him of the decision of Burco Dean not to develop in Barnoldswick, the head of the firm stated, "we were very impressed indeed with the willingness of the town officials, as represented by yourself, to assist us to get established."

Mr. Wilkinson told our reporter that representatives of the firm who visited Barnoldswick had been impressed by the factory, but the adaptations that would have been necessary to make it suitable for their type of production were mainly responsible for their ultimate decision. It was not the original purchase price.