



Workers demonstrated in vain to save the Bentley piano works at Woodchester from closure.

THE END OF AN ERA

THE WORLD famous Bentley Piano Company near Stroud is to close and all workers are to lose their jobs.

After weeks of uncertainty about the future of the firm managing director David Grover and his wife Jenny have sold the company, based at Woodchester, to a rival.

Skills

The sale to the London-based Welmar piano company means the closure of the factory, the loss of all 37 jobs and the end of an era for Stroud as a centre of top quality piano manufacture..

Union convener Philip Farmilow said the workers were disgusted by the news and felt they had been betrayed by the firm's boss.

by Janet Brice

"We all know Mr Grover was offered an acceptable alternative which would have saved all our jobs - but he turned it down," said Mr Farmilow.

Many of the workers have served the company for more than 20 years and know it will be very hard to find another job using their specialised skills.

Three directors of the company had put forward a plan to buy the firm and relaunch it.

However they were ousted from the board of directors following a meeting last week and their offer has now been rejected.

Worried employees demonstrated outside the

meeting and have also sent a petition, containing hundreds of signatures from the area, to Stroud MP Roger Knapman.

Three years ago the company was producing between 1,000 and 1,500 high quality pianos a year, selling at up to £5,000 each. Last year production had fallen to about 700.

The company was originally founded in London in 1906 and moved to Stroud in 1911.

Damage

However in February 1938 the main factory building was completely destroyed by fire and the Bentley works moved to Woodchester.

Fire struck again in 1989, causing more than £1 million in damage but a new factory rose out of the ashes and was officially re-opened in 1991 by Princess Michael of Kent.