

Piano firm

THREE directors of the famous Bentley piano firm were dismissed yesterday at the end of a boardroom wrangle over the company's future.

The trio of non-shareholding directors had put forward a plan to buy the company and re-launch it.

During yesterday's board meeting to discuss their plan, the company's 37 workers picketed outside with placards backing the buy-out scheme.

They supported the proposal on the grounds that it was the only way to

keep the factory at Woodchester, near Stroud, open and save their jobs.

But the majority shareholder, managing director David Grover and his wife Jenny, have made clear they want to sell out to the rival Welmar Piano firm.

The sale would mean the Woodchester factory being closed down with the loss of all 37 jobs.

At the end of yesterday's board meeting, Mr Grover met the workers to tell them that the three rebel directors had been sacked but also to re-assure them that no decision has been made yet about the firm's future.

He pledged to tell them as soon as he and his wife had decided whether to accept the management buy-out or to

sell to Welmar.

Three years ago the firm 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 700 — but the sacked directors who want to buy the firm say they are convinced that with better marketing techniques they could soon build up the output again.

The three directors and the workforce say they are prepared to invest their own money to keep the Bentley name alive.

Because of the uncertainty about the firm's future orders are so low at present that staff have been laid off this week. But they are due to return to work on Monday.

POLICE PROBE RIDDLE OF GRAFFITI ATTACK

POLICE are probing a graffiti attack on the home of a planning officer after a plans battle with his neighbour.

A wall was defaced on the remote cottage of Martin Levick in Hereford End, near Hereford.

Mr Levick, a planning officer with South Herefordshire council, has fought plans by neighbour Nicki Port, for an animal skin rug business which she runs on her smallholding.

The word "Skins" was

sprayed on an outside wall of Mr Levick's cottage in red paint.

Mrs Port said she was baffled and added that the graffiti could not have been by an animal rights protestor as cause local campaigners were aware she used sheep and goat skins from small farmers, not furs.

Mr Levick and his wife Lynn protested to South Herefordshire council about alleged nuisance from Mrs Port's business. She was refused planning permission.