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Piano makers battle to re-launch factory

WORK was continuing behind the scenes today to re-start piano making at Stroud following the sale of the historic Bentley Piano Company.

Former Bentley worker Peter Freke and two fellow former directors were still trying to raise around £250,000 needed to relaunch a new Woodchester or Stroud Piano firm.

A London businessman with a small group of other people was also interested and was working towards the same goal, Mr Freke said.

Both groups had the same aim of possibly buying

the soon to be redundant, but purpose built Bentley factory, and much of its specialist machinery, said Mr Freke.

But he said one problem was that the capital needed was too small for major investors to become involved.

Bentley's was sold by chairman and majority shareholder David Grover to piano manufacturing competitors Whelpdale, Maxwell and Codd last month.

Mr Grover blamed intense competition from abroad

and the length and depth of the British economic recession for his decision to sell.

All 37 workers were made redundant when the rival piano makers took over, despite an earlier management buy-out attempt.

Bentley's had established a worldwide reputation since its foundation in London in 1906.

A serious fire destroyed the present works at North Woodchester in 1989, but the business was rebuilt and a new factory officially opened by Princess Michael just over a year ago.