

OPERA AT CLONTER FARM

NEAR THE VILLAGE of Swettenham, on the Cheshire Plain - not far from Pastmaster Sir Bernard Lovell's Jodrell Bank - is Clonter Farm.

In 1974 Jeffery Lockett decided to correct what appeared a rather bleak operatic landscape. Silage and farm machinery would make way for Verdi! Straw bales and picnics proved a popular mixture which, thanks to the enthusiasm and loyalty of early pioneering audiences, enabled the project to develop into its present stage. As so often happens, success brought problems. Straw bales and the associated surroundings were no longer acceptable to the authorities. Changes had to be made. Today an audience of 300 can be comfortably accommodated in the barn. The seating is raked so that everyone has a good view of the stage. In the foyers behind, tables and chairs are arranged where picnics can still be enjoyed.

These developments also stimulated a reassessment of the musical rôle. Accordingly, the Clonter Farm Music Trust was set up with the aim of providing training and performing experience for talented young professional musicians. Through the Percival-Hart Fund the Company has been able to make its own contribution. Many artists of varying professional experience have performed in the barn since the debut in 1974, several of whom are now principal singers with the leading opera houses in this country.

Recently, during the current season, a Lollipop Evening of Party Pieces was organised. It comprised of a variety of arias and duets designed to provide different opportunities for the cast of Carmen (which was still in rehearsal) to show off their individual talents. The result was splendid - which explained why most of the ensuing performances of Carmen were sold out!

Undoubtedly, the Trust has achieved its aim and become an important spring board for artists and musicians to further their careers. For the opera fan, it is an opportunity to hear the stars of tomorrow in these most unusual and friendly surroundings.

.... On a lighter note

One of the recipients of this year's Charles Santley Memorial Gift was Norman Lumsden alias JP Hartley of Yellow Pages Fly Fishing fame!



Jeffery Lockett at rehearsals

The Company Music Makers - The Morley family

FOR MOST PEOPLE music coupled with the name Morley brings to mind the age of madrigals. Examples include: "There was a Lover and His Lass", and the book entitled "The Plain and Easy Introduction to Music", by Thomas Morley, Master of the Queens Music who lived in the City of London and held the monopoly to print music which was granted to him by Queen Elizabeth I. Thomas Morley did have dealings with the Stationers Company but he was not - so far as I know, a member of the Musicians Company.

The connection between the Musicians Company and my family dates back to the beginning of this century; Joseph George Morley was a harp maker with a factory in Fulham and showrooms at South Kensington. However, he had many other interests. He was in partnership with a Parisian piano maker and collected antique stringed and keyboard instruments of the harpsichord family. Some of these were included in a "Loan Exhibition of Ancient Musical Instruments" at Fishmongers Hall in 1904 held by the Musicians Company.

Older members may remember that I was apprenticed through the Musicians Company to my cousin, Pastmaster John Sebastian Morley, the harp and spinet maker, (Joseph George's son) whose building in the Old Brompton Road, was visited by musicians and collectors from far and wide. This was a landmark which I came to know well, especially when we started to make Clavichords and Harpsichords in 1955.

The arrangement was quite simple. John Sebastian suggested which antique instruments we should copy. I would make the measurements and drawings and the case-work and soundboards were made up in the Robert Morley piano factory. Then John Sebastian and I would make the jacks or

tangents, fit the keyboard and finally string and voice to produce a completed instrument. After a short while, demand grew and the instruments were completely made in the factory and replaced the production of new pianos.

Though John Sebastian and I shared common names, our exact relationship was rather remote, because his great grandfather James Morley was my great great grandfather. Little is known about James Morley, born in 1755, who was a music seller and instrument dealer in Bishopsgate, and his wife Elizabeth, except that they had a very large family most of whom were involved in the music trade.

One son, William, began in Upper Regent Street as a music publisher. His business survived until the beginning of this century.

Another, Henry, made pianos in Greenwich from 1822 and his family had a music shop at Blackheath until 1942. John Sebastian and his father Joseph George were descended from another son James. The youngest son Charles made pianos in Sun Street. His youngest son, Robert, moved to Lewisham in 1881, where he opened a piano shop. Subsequently, a factory was built in what was at that time, a rapidly developing and prosperous suburb of London.

Then, pianos were in a very great demand, and a new Bechstein or Bluthner Grand could cost over a hundred pounds. In comparison, most pianos were less illustrious, and a typical upright instrument cost under twenty pounds and could be rented or bought.

In many ways little has changed in the last hundred years - the most expensive pianos are still imported from Germany. We still make keyboard instruments though they are now clavichords and harpsichords rather than pianos. Robert Morley's Company is still owned and run by the family, at present myself and my daughters Angela, Fiona and Julia who has just been admitted to the Musicians Company.

J.S.P.M.