



*Candleford by Flora Thompson. Directors Bill Bryden and Sebastian Graham-Jones. Lighting — William Dudley and Laurence Clayton. Plans by Tim Foster. Photo: Michael Mayhew.*



'port' from which the helicopter emerged, headlights and flashing red light beneath the base skids giving a convincing impression of reality, together with a sound track of rotor blades. We stopped short of fans overhead to whip up the sand covered floor below.

The lofty bandstand was virtually strapped to the Cottesloe's ceiling, which happens also to be the Olivier Theatre's floor! The appreciation of the rock music by the Cottesloe's audiences was not shared by those performing in the Olivier — where structurally transmitted noise could be heard from below.

The tiered seating for dispatches was rented, and came in the form of outdoor stadium seating: plastic moulded seat panels which pulled out and turned up two at a time, housed in cast alloy sections. A scaffold under-structure united these sections. The opportunity to rent seating was a chance for a successful experiment in layout, but the quality of the seating left a great deal to be desired. The claimed flexibility of the system turned out to be the 'flex' in the seats: any occupant weighing more than ten stone, was likely to be delivered into the row in front.

Having seating on four sides enclosing the performance space did however produce a very concentrated bowl, with a technical handling and circulation area behind and beneath the seating, very much like a circus, and not unlike the Stoke-on-Trent's New Victoria Theatre, opened in 1986. This

together with the existing staircases within the auditorium, which allow vertical movement of the audience, enabled the Cottesloe to share something of a football stadium (whilst taking only a fraction of the revenue!).

Between the opening of the first two parts of the Mystery Cycle came Keith Dewhurst's faithful adaptation of Flora Thompson's novels about Oxfordshire agricultural life at the turn of the century, *LARK RISE TO CANDLEFORD*.

The first adaptation *LARK RISE*, opened in March 1978, and was followed by *CANDLEFORD* in November 1979. Each takes place in a single day, the first in harvest time, the second in mid-winter. The plays again gave Bill Dudley and Bill Bryden the challenge of multilocation.

They chose to represent the young heroine's home naturalistically to one end of the flattened space. Accurately detailed interiors represented Laura's parents' house, and the village post office in Candleford to which she moves to take her first employment. The plays were to be performed as promenades, as a development of the experience gained from the first *PASSION* play.

As a contrast to the interiors, the far end of the space (the stage in the more normally used end stage arrangement), were set stylised three dimensional backdrops, either cornfield or wintry forest allowed approaching entrances and exits to the arena. Between, the flat floor served as field, village

green, church, lane, snow covered landscape or lowering forest. Overhead, a sky cloth covered the entire theatre above the heads of the audience, which, when top lit with 5K skypans floods borrowed from Pinewood Studios, bathed the whole Theatre with a shadowless daylight; when underlit with dark blue, it was transformed into a clear evening sky from which projected stars and harvest moon beamed down on the villagers assembling for evensong — at which the harsh reality of the twentieth century strikes home during the reading of the World War One death roll; names of many of the characters with whom one has spent the evening, including Lauras' little brother Edmund.

Reality catches up with this rural backwater, but the chill of death gives way to a celebration by cast and spectators, as everyone shares in the Grand Circle Dance — a Breugel painting come to life!

The experience of those on the upper galleries, and those below who move with the action, clearly differs in a Promenade. The scene may be set with a minimum of props. Those with the actors below ARE the scenery within an environment shared with those actors. The circle of faces round the scene become the inner surface of a crystal ball in which the moment is continually reflected, giving a heightened sense to the text and the performers at the nucleus of the action.

This local stimulus from the spectators is accelerated by the corporate experience,