

# Sadness as grand piano story ends

4-6-03

Picture: Martin Perry C231819-MP07-

by Jo Barber

reporter@stroudcitizen.fsworld.co.uk

**POTENTIAL buyers tickling the ivory keys of dozens of craftsman-made instruments sounded a sad note at the end of piano manufacturing in Gloucestershire.**

Bidders from around the country tested the tunes of upright and grand pianos when they turned up to view before today's auction of all the remaining stock, machinery and tools of the British Piano Manufacturing Company Ltd at Woodchester.

For although there are doubtless specialist individual piano makers in the UK, the county's BPMC factory was the last in the country with a production line supplying the famous names of Broadwood, Bentley, Welmar, Knight and Woodchester.

Competition from the Far East, where labour is cheaper, was blamed when BPMC went into liquidation with debts of £1.5 million earlier this year.

The collapse of its holding company, Whelpdale Maxwell and Codd, meant the loss of 23 jobs at the company's factory at Woodchester and led to today's auction sale.

But the occasion was also the end of nearly 100 years of piano manufacturing on the site.

"I think it is sad," said pianist and church organist Anne Harris, from Stroud, who was visiting the sale.

"They stored famous pianos as well. There was the little organ that Nelson had on the *Victory* and the piano Chopin used when he toured this country.

"I came to see them and expected them to be behind a rope, like in a museum, but I was allowed to play them!"

Everything from piano trolleys, through strung backs to sets of



bass strings were due to go under the hammer.

Piano tuner Roger Field, from Dorset, said he had come to look mostly at the tools.

"It was the last manufacturer in Britain. There were 360 at the beginning of the last century," said

Mr Field. "Much of this has no value to anyone. It's just scrap really."

Graham Randall, of liquidators Numerica based in Bristol, said the Woodchester auction was, however, expected to raise around £100,000.

■ **SAD NOTE:** Auctioneer Kimm Smith and some of the lots being offered at the Woodchester piano factory sale. Left is one of the lots, the original company crest, and right is the factory site.

