

David Newland

Drama Arts

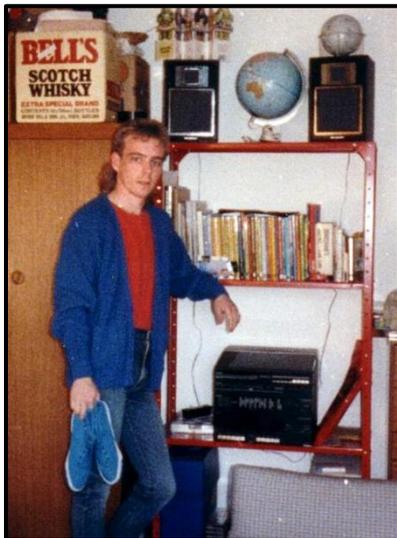
1984-87

Student Union President 1987-89

I fell for Bretton in 1984 when I went to interview/audition for what was then the third intake of the new Dramatic Arts honours degree (DA in the jargon of the time). Walking from the village bus stop that first time in the April/May sunshine was truly magical. By September I couldn't wait to start. Of course I was totally unprepared for the culture shock of moving from the comfortable English southeast into the 'warzone' of the year-long miners' strike – this really was whole communities under attack by the London government.

I spent my first year on campus in Dearne 9 (I was so chuffed to see that everyone carried on the wardrobe list I started in 1984!) then four great years in the fabled 'Scissett Flats'.

Dramatic Arts with Dance was an intense three years, with plenty of eye-opening learning, fulfilling self-discovery, uplifting harmony singing, body-shivering shiatsu and reflexology, suffused with bonding, trust, debate, disagreement and affirmation, plus those three-session days, head-scratchable essay writing, clashing rehearsals and one unfortunate episode of Hodgsonesque direction-by-the-elbow.



1987

I joined the ENTS committee as soon as I could, then the Bar Management Committee (beginning a five-year stint of glass-collecting and washing!), then got elected Social Secretary in 1985, then Academic Affairs Officer in 1986. In 1987 I was elected President (interestingly the third DA student in a row to do the job), and was elected again for the 88/89 year. That was two years of amazing hard graft and constant learning.

We paid off all the Students Union debts, achieved a penny-perfect audit two years running, refurbished the offices in Mansion, refurbished the bar and upstairs KB (sometimes hard to tell in the dark up there!), relocated the tiny shop into larger premises opposite the porters' lodge, revamped the constitution, diverted West and

South Yorks bus services onto the campus and got student services written into the governing document of the new Bretton Hall Corporation (the privatised entity that took over the college from Wakefield in 1989).

In those days we were just two sabbatical officers (my Vice President in 87/88 was Marilyn Everett-Jones and in 88/89 was Nel Card), a team of volunteer Executive Officers, an equally dedicated group of volunteer supporters and a couple of members of staff.

Committees abounded: Entertainments, External Affairs, SU Executive, Council and General Meetings, Academic Board, Policy & Planning, Health & Safety, Student Services, Board of Governors, YSP Management, Bretton Lakes Management, then latterly the Higher Education Corporation as the blight of privatisation and businessmen began to take hold.

We played our part in NUS politics, taking 20% of the students to one demo in London, many wearing specially designed demo t-shirts and marching under brilliantly artistic banners. We got one demo banner on page 3 of the 'Sunday Times' and the fronts of several regional dailies, putting the Principal's nose out of joint! ["Hi" with raised hand] And we survived the 'Battle of Westminster Bridge' in 1988.



1988 – Demonstration in London

But one of my proudest moments was when Nat West Bank opened their first ever branch by the canteen after months of negotiation. It stayed open one day a week until 2007. Then for several years after that we used to gather together a band of former SU officers and go back to help out in Fresher's Week; I think my last one was 1993 or 94.

I still miss the place and had very mixed feelings at the 2007 reunion. It must have been so difficult to be the last 'crew' in there. I've been back a couple of times since (most recently January 2013 in the snow and May 2013 for the hostel visits reunion), to the devastatingly sad and neglected place. It'll be very odd to see it in its new guise, but at least some of it will be preserved and protected and the landscape is in good hands with the YSP. I still remember Peter Murray coming in 1986 to show the SU Exec his plans for the new Bothy Cafe and gallery building which now graces the grounds. YSP seems to be the natural heir to all things Bretton Hall and it's brilliant that it works so closely with the Alumni to keep the memories alive.

Let's hope the name survives in the hotel complex's new name – initially they wanted to call it 'The Bretton'! Can you imagine our wonderful college reduced in stature to sound like a small three-bed-house-with-garage on a new-build Barratt housing estate. At the 2013 reunion lots of us told Mark the Rushbond director what we thought about that!

Bretton Hall meant so much to me. I left the area in 1989, but whenever I see the mast at Emley Moor it still feels like coming home. In Wales we have a thing called 'hiraeth' – the longing and yearning for home mixed with a wistful sense of belonging and, for some, the joy of coming home – that's Bretton!



Emley Moor - 2013