

Freda Morgan (née Johnson)

English & Drama

1958-60

A Legacy of Bretton.

My interview for acceptance in 1958 was by Martial Rose - the Drama lecturer. I thought it was a fiasco because I didn't know the answer to any of the questions. What probably sealed the deal was my answer to the question: "Why do you want to become a teacher?" I replied without hesitation: "I love children and I love Literature."



Freda Johnson c.1960

There were about 100 students all training to teach either secondary or primary and only disciplines such as Music, Art, and Drama were taught as a two-year course. Incidentally, we learnt about Psychology of Education from Mr. Good and Children's Literature from Miss Jowett. I took main subject English and Drama and subsidiary Art. So I got to know Mr. Olive, the Art tutor and some students like Denis Palmer, Peter Wright, and someone whose first name was Noel.



Margaret Dunn, 1959

My favourite sessions were in the New Hall with Miss Dunn. This was two hours of Movement on Monday morning. The other activities that grabbed me were the productions we did for parents and friends. Martial Rose also took us to Germany to perform the third Act from Hamlet to some schools. That was the highlight of my life as I got to play Ophelia in both casts; the other Ophelia was sick.

What I valued most was the chance to enjoy the environment and change my life-style from living in a mining village near Wigan to a grand mansion in acres of glorious land. It was like living in a novel and very highly pressurized, emotionally and intellectually for me.

I loved all the passages of Drama from Greek, Mystery Plays, Shakespeare, Restoration and Modern. We didn't just read them, we staged and acted them. Norah Lambourne was our immaculate Properties tutor. Great fun! We had Geraldine Stevenson to enhance our Dance with John Dalby on Piano.

Socially, life could be fraught. I was 20 and had been out working before I decided on teaching. I thought I was world-wise. Well, like everything at Bretton, my world was turned upside down. I had never really had much experience in dealing with young men. Living so close together, and co-creating Dramas, etc. was the most intimate I had ever been. I realised quite early on that someone in a relationship took charge and that seemed to be the man generally. The joke was that if you made coffee for a bloke and sat on Fly-Over, (a seated stair-case over Portico Hall) he was 'spoken for'.



Flyover – Portico Hall



Martial Rose – 1950s

My best friends were Avril Watson, with whom I shared a Drama job after Bretton and knew until her death a few years ago. I am still friends with Barbara Hawarth/Wright, who remains a close friend, although we live so far apart. Some of my male friends were Dennis Palmer, Arthur Lacey, Jack Cooper, and John Bakewell. I've recently been in touch with Martial Rose and Gareth Owen who writes lovely poetry and songs.

Barbara Wright was great with a camera so she should have quite a set of Bretton shots from this time. Very few of us had cameras. We were paid for by the Government and under the kind auspices of Mr. Clegg, local councillor. He was responsible for Bretton Hall being an Institution with an Arts remit.

The cold was bitter and I lived out my first year as a lodger in the railway cottage at Durkar. If I missed the last bus at 9.20pm I had to walk 3 or 4 miles in pitch darkness, which I found very frightening. When I came into the main house I still slept in ski pyjamas, socks and a hat.

I remember radiators, but in the main rooms, not bedrooms that I can remember. Teaching Practice, travelling to all parts of the West Riding, was something to test the muscles and sinews of anyone, both physically, intellectually and emotionally. In New Zealand where I live now, the phrase is: “Sharpen up!” We certainly did that at Bretton.

The recreational times of learning to drink at the Black Bull were indeed formative experiences. It was a haul of 3 or 4 miles up a hill in rough paths, but was always worth it and the locals coped with us well.

What is the Legacy of Bretton? Telling people, who went to 'ordinary' training Colleges, about the High teas that had a newly-minted musical Grace before the meal from an upstairs Gallery, or musicians skating and playing on the ice on the frozen lake.

My own legacy is that I always start from scratch, when devising, writing or creating dramas and participation of actors, students, and incorporating their ideas is paramount. I learnt this at Bretton. It widened my horizons intellectually, so, from being a late developer, I completed an Open University degree and went on to higher realms of teaching. My own family have benefited from this. The eldest one, John Mitchinson is a publisher, a writer, founder of “Unbound” on-line, in the UK. The younger one, Mark, is making a name for himself in NZ mainly as a TV actor.

Something of Bretton carries on, and I applaud the insight which went into setting it up. So, in that way it lives on, whatever is decided about the building.

Bretton Hall has an outreach all of its own.



Freda Morgan.

April, 2015.