

Janet Deakin (née Dawson)

English

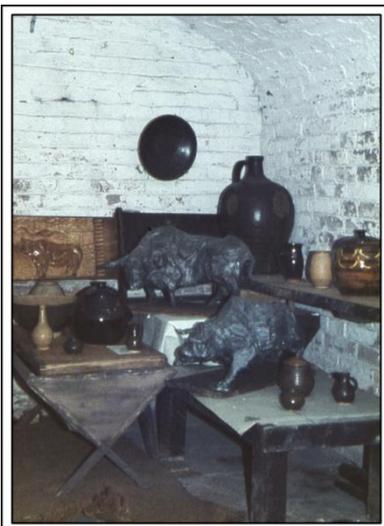
1960-63

A Place for Solace and Contemplation.



Janet Dawson approaching the Hall - c.1963

My future husband and I were both students at Bretton Hall from 1960 -1963, when it was 'just' a Teacher Training college, and we came out with a Certificate in Education. (It was a couple of years after we left that the chance to get a degree from Leeds University was established.)



In 1960 the College introduced a Mathematics course, which my future husband—Mick Deakin—studied as a main subject. Initially I went to study Art, but ended up specialising in English, with Art as a subsidiary. This was because I was quite overawed by the confidence and talent of the Art students, and never felt I could match them, so the switch to English returned me to my comfort zone.

I still enjoyed Art, however, particularly the pottery and modelling. I remember Don Askew and Eric Gleave, who made enormous sculptures and pots.

*Sculpture & Pots of Don Askew
& Eric Gleave*

Academically, the course then was not particularly challenging; probably the most stressful times were Teaching Practice stints. My three schools were in Normanton, Castleford and finally at Thorne Grammar School in Wakefield—I felt quite privileged! I still recall the very early starts needed to get to school on time, the nerves and the endless late nights devising lesson notes and writing up lessons.

Two memories stick from Thorne Grammar. The worst was teaching a lesson on a Shakespeare play—I can't remember which—with my tutor, Miss Jowett, watching. It might have been okay, but I had just developed an abscess on my front tooth and was in agony! Not the best lesson ever! The second memory was correcting a child's essay about his favourite pop group. I was not very up to date, so corrected 'Beatle' to 'Beetle'!

In my first year I shared a five-bedded room on women's main landing. Mick was upstairs on men's landing. I had a window above Portico, with a view across towards the chapel and down to the lake.

We were woken by the Canada geese in the mornings. The autumn colours over towards High Hoyland were stunning.

I really enjoyed singing with the college choir, culminating in performances in Wakefield Cathedral, and one Christmas singing Britten's 'Ceremony of Carols' (with Malcolm Nicholls playing the harpsichord).

While singing, we processed with candles from the Bow Room to Pillar Hall. Very magical! It became quite a regular occurrence to gather on Flyover of an evening to sing in close harmony. I always believed that *we* started that tradition, but I may be wrong! And talking of Flyover and close harmony, before every evening meal - 'formal dinner' - a small choir would sing a simple grace from there. I still remember the tingle when at my very first formal dinner the grace floated down to our first-year nervous ears.



The building of the hostels began during our first year. The first two completed were Allendale and Beaumont. Fifteen women from main landing were the first to move in - I was one of them. I was on the top floor of Allendale with an even better view of the lake and the front of the main building. The hostel building continued apace. Eventually, when Litherop was finished, Mick moved in there.

Jan Dawson's room in Allendale Hostel - 1963

The refectory was brand new as well - and I can remember much fuss about wearing stilettos - we were inspected as we entered and had to use plastic caps if our heels were deemed too sharp! That was really the end of the formal dinners that we had had in the main building, though we were still expected to change and 'posh up' a bit!



*Mick Deakin & Janet Dawson, with friends
Joan Trudgett & Peter Bear*

When we first arrived at Bretton in 1960, Kennel Block was used as a student social area, but it just had a television. We held dances there, but there was no bar. This was one of Mick's successes - in our final year, he as treasurer and his friend Pete as president of the students' Union, persuaded the Principal to have a bar installed; too late for us alas, but a step in the right direction!

Lectures? We had a few!

Work? We did some!

'Poppa' Friend's education lectures were held in the Bow Room first thing in the morning, and were not as well attended as they should have been, so he instituted a 'signing in' sheet that was passed around during the lecture. On one occasion it was noted that Mick was signed in four times! He was actually still in bed, but had some kind friends!

Some of the highlights for me were the regular trips up to the Lake District, organised by English tutor Bob Fowler. These were ostensibly to allow art students to paint and English students to write poetry, but in reality it was a wonderful time out in the mountains. Mick and I conquered a few peaks during those magic times!



*Mick Deakin and Janet Dawson on top
of Castle Crag, in Borrowdale.*

Who remembers 'Movement'?

On the whole, the women enjoyed it, but not so the men! During their timetabled sessions with Bert Thomas, a number of them – some of whom had come to college after National Service, would, as soon as music was played, form up in fours and march up and down! The session was soon renamed 'Practical Movement' and they did rugby practice! The women's sessions were taken by Miss Dunn, and I loved the freedom of expression. One time we were working on a dance to Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue', ready for a college show. I was gutted when I discovered that the next Lake District trip coincided with the show, so I had to make a choice!

The Lake District won!

Who remembers Telephone Duty?

Very necessary in those days before mobile phones! Sitting in Portico Hall, answering the phone and running around to find the required student! Then the scary bit, having to go around switching lights off at eleven o'clock, the time when everyone should have been safely in the building. (There were a few who quite regularly slipped in over the roof, however!) Then came the worst bit – walking the length of the basement, switching off lights as we went ...and wondering about the 'Grey Lady', who was rumoured to walk at night! Mick's friend Pete swore that on one occasion he had just reached the exit door of the basement when all the lights came back on! I wonder!

There are so many memories that I don't really know where to start! The lake featured in many of them for me. My first close experience was when, as a rookie interested in canoeing, I was taken with a few others to be introduced to the 'art'.

A second-year student gave us a short spiel about how to get in a canoe safely. He was very casual, and very well dressed. He then decided to show us how to do it- and yes, you've probably guessed already— he didn't make a very good job of it and ended up in the water—suit, wallet and all!



Canoeing on the Lower Lake

The Canada geese became the sound of Bretton for me, the cacophony waking me on many mornings. They were attractive and interesting to watch, but they didn't half leave a mess on the lake shore! Then I remember swimming from Dam Head in the summer heat wave of 1961. Mick remembers deciding to dive in, and discovering only afterwards the rusted stanchions of an old pier lurking in the depths. Phew!



Jan Dawson on Cascade Bridge

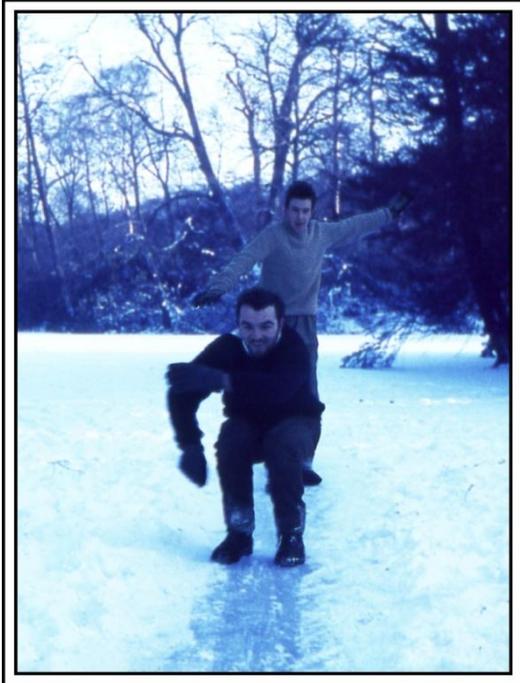
Mick reminded me of another close call. He and two friends decided to take canoes out during the big winds of 1963, but there were only two singles available, so Mick opted for a double.

Going down the lake to Dam Head was a doddle, but when he got there he realised that the wind was blowing quite large waves over the outflow into the river, and that posed the possibility of going over. However, when he tried to turn the double canoe around, the wind wouldn't let him, so he had to paddle backwards all the way to the boathouse.



Walking on the frozen Upper Lake - 1963

In the winter of 1963, the time of the big freeze, I remember sledging down the slopes from High Hoyland after gingerly walking across the lake on the ice to get to the sledging spot. It did creak a bit! The snow drifts were perfectly sculpted by the wind - I wish I had had a camera!

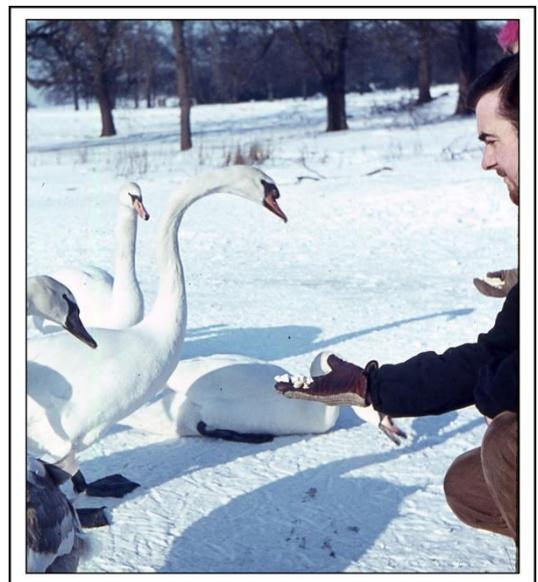


Sliding on the frozen lake – c.1963

Mick and friends made a long slide on the ice of top lake, but while trying to make it longer, his friend Jim, who had just returned to college after breaking his collarbone in a scooter accident, took a fall - and broke it again!

I remember some parties held in the Yew Grove at the head of the top lake - that is until the afore-mentioned winds of 1963 blew them all down, along with a number of other trees in the grounds. Mick stayed on after the final term to help to cut and clear the wood.

But most of all to me, the lake was a place for solace and contemplation, and many a time I would just walk around it, marvelling at the peace and the beauty, examining the shell grotto, listening to the birds.



Feeding the swans on the frozen lake

As our final term came to a close we all had to have a simple medical, conducted by the college nurse. We all had to hand in a urine sample for testing. A notice went up to the effect that a number of male students had not yet submitted their samples. They were mostly from Litherop—Mick's hostel. They got a large cider flagon, filled it, and submitted it with a label - 'Urine samples for the nurse - love from Mick, Jim, Gordie, Pete', etc.....!

She was not impressed!

Mick and I had dated off and on throughout those three years, and didn't really come together until during our first year of teaching, but we share many memories; these are but a few!

Those were happy times, and a gentle introduction to life as a grown-up!

Janet Deakin (née Dawson).

June, 2016.



Janet Dawson's last, lingering look on the final day at Bretton in 1963.

*Monochrome photographs provided by Janet Deakin.
Coloured photographs kindly supplied by Peter Bear.*