

Leslie Burtenshaw

Music

1949-51

“We Are Still Fanning the Flames”.

Leslie Burtenshaw



1950



2016



Bretton Hall Staff and Students - 1950

Photos of people arrayed in serried ranks like those above adorn most academic institutions and lie in the backs of alumni's drawers, hidden from the light for many years. They also occasionally appear in local newspapers, optimistically labelled: "Where are they now?" This one perhaps, is different – firstly, the photograph was taken more than sixty years ago, less than a year after Bretton Hall opened its doors to students and staff in 1949. Secondly, in 1999, twenty-two survivors of the above pioneers reassembled at Bretton Hall for a Reunion.

At the Reunion, when all the well-wishing was done, tribute was paid to those who had died. Among those mentioned were: Ron Mallaband, who became a much respected Senior Music Organiser for Cheshire; Ron Belk, Head of Music at Ecclesfield, whose musical productions included *Die Fledermaus* and others at an amazing high standard; Edgar Waddicor, who became Head at Hellifield and then Queensway at Guiseley; Geoff Bridge, appointed Lecturer at Norwich College of Education, and died before being able to take up his post; Derrick Walker, who spent much of his career spreading a Yorkshire philosophy in Gwelo, Rhodesia, and returned to become a Head Teacher in Dewsbury, his old home town. Some names were forgotten, but it was recalled that many others had distinguished themselves along the exciting but hard road of teaching during the second half of the twentieth century.



Reunion of the 1949 pioneers in the summer of 1999

There was talk of the idealism so readily generated by the notion that if the Arts were taught with enthusiasm and commitment, then education would sweep forward with an enlightened egalitarianism. The first students were clever people who had understood what Bretton offered and were ready and willing to grasp the principles. The musicians were people who could play two or more instruments, knew what to expect from a choir and developed skills in organising and running a school orchestra. The Art students became skilled in the new broad front of art teaching—painting, yes, but all the other unexplored areas of the school curriculum like plaster work, wire sculpture, clay and the usage of glaze, fabric printing, etc. The Drama students, who first joined the College one year after its opening, became adept in planning and executing a free drama experience, and extended this into language development and the building of personal confidence.

The foundation of the College was the brainchild of the celebrated Sir Alec Clegg—then Director of Education for the West Riding of Yorkshire. He had absorbed and for years advocated a vigorous approach to music and art and he remained personally involved in the work of Bretton throughout the formative years and beyond.



Sir Alec Clegg

Once a fortnight all students attended a lecture on ‘Arts in Education’ and were privileged to meet some of the great minds of the post-war period: Herbert Read; Carl Dolmetsch; Bernard Shore; Sir Gordon Russell and Hans Feibusch, who visited Bretton to renovate the murals and became a profound influence on some of the art students. (Feibusch died in 1998 at the age of 98 years).



***Founding Principal –
John F. Friend***

Without doubt the instigator of the Bretton experience was the Principal—John Frederick Friend, a senior educationist with extensive experience. As a mathematician he had chosen a hard pathway by being at the helm of an “arts teaching” organisation, but he clearly had that special ability to run the institution in a positive manner with an eye to balance and the tough requirements of post-war schools.

During the first year there was no official appointment of a Vice-Principal, but Mr. Friend’s Senior-Assistant was Charles Good, a worldly pragmatist, who observed and recorded human behaviour and enjoyed what he saw.

On the first day of College — 25th September, 1949 – Charlie Good stationed himself on the Portico steps, ready to welcome the nervous individuals who were arriving from all over the country. One, an ex-RAF type, stepped out of his taxi and whistled for Charlie to come over and help with his bag. The Principal’s senior lecturer duly obliged and carried the fellow’s belongings up to the second floor and accepted the proffered shilling with deference.



Charles Good

Imagine how this student felt when at his first education lecture the tutor who walked in was the “porter” himself! (The tale of Charlie Good’s compliance in the misunderstanding became folklore, and was often discussed among staff and students for many a year.)

Mr. Good's lectures were models of good sense and economy. Time-wasting was anathema to Charlie, and students were warned of its perils. Each lecture would begin with the same words:

"Write this down: 'Start each day afresh, with no reference to the tribulations and troubled relationships of yesterday.' "

Then we would proceed with personal experiences to support and expand the statement, and the eventual result was a broadening of good classroom practice and the developing feeling that we might be able to measure up to the demands of teaching, after all.



Gerald Whitehead

Gerald Whitehead was in charge of English. His personality, which included an urbane and self-effacing manner, was apparent in an imposing presence: he was 6' 7" tall, made the more attractive by a fine face and physique. Those of us for whom English had been concerned with spelling and grammar were amazed to be confronted with a cool, critical, analytical approach.

We started with some decorative examples of English prose and then launched aggressively into Sophocles, Oedipus and Euripides's Trojan Women. During our two years' period of study at Bretton, we covered in great detail a large selection of T.S. Elliot; a strange play by Gordon Bottomley, called Culbin Sands; two Shakespeare plays—Othello and A Midsummer Night's Dream; all of the poets of the First World War; Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, and a good many of Shakespeare's sonnets. Sometimes, Gerald Whitehead enlisted the support of one of the two music tutors—Raymond Roberts—in reading to the students in the 'Old English style', convincing all of the musicality of language.

Daphne Bird was Head of Department for Music. She is remembered for her encyclopaedic mind and her speed of communication: she once covered all the Handel oratorios, histories, librettos, musical examples, predominant features, harmonic analysis and structures in about one and a half hours! I still have my illegible notes from that lecture. Miss Bird's commitment to tonic solfa was regarded as idiosyncratic—though it was supported by West Riding schools that had reputations for good music. I found it difficult to accept and tried hard to teach the system in my first post as a music teacher in a Secondary Modern School, without really making any impact. Some ten years later we approached the period where any teacher who introduced any aspect of formality into music was regarded as a fool, but, eventually, Daphne Bird's solfa was once more proved effective.



Daphne Bird



Raymond Roberts

Raymond Roberts, the second music tutor, was a Welshman with the customary natural flow of language. He had a calm, thoughtful approach and was much admired by those older talented musicians of the 1949 intake. His love of music permeated all that he did, and his lectures were characterised by a feeling of spontaneity, but he had the ability to surprise with a few flashes of brilliance. Some were lucky enough to go out with him to the pub, theatre or concert and be rewarded on return with an impromptu rendition of part of a symphony just heard or, what is remembered vividly, the 'Harry Lime' theme, played on the zither as in the film, 'The Third Man'.

Raymond Roberts went on to become Staff HMI for Music in the 1970s, and sadly died of a heart attack soon after. He had married the highly popular Domestic Bursar, Sue Best, and they had two sons.

The senior lecturer in Art was Miss Seonaid Robertson. One of her students, Fred Sumner, stated in a reminiscence that her "book on 'Creative Crafts' should be compulsory reading for all, and whose service to education is in every way distinguished..."



Seonaid Robertson

Her influence was entirely conceptual and encouraged a love for old country crafts and things formed by nature. Additionally, she and her colleagues persuaded a number of celebrities in the arts to stay over at College and speak to students.

At our reunion, we, the pioneers—twenty-two survivors of the 1949 intake to Bretton Hall—were proud of having been involved in something big and exciting. We hadn't merely *survived*; Bretton had fitted us well to shoulder our responsibilities, and we were very lucky to maintain the physical energy and personal enthusiasm to play a part in the great affair.

In response to the motto of our College badge: *we are still fanning the flames.*

Leslie Burtenshaw. 2016



Qui non ardet non incendit