

Antony Osborne

BA (Hons) Music

1982-85

So Many Memories



In Summer 1982, I'd not received quite the exam results I was expecting, so it was clear that I wouldn't be going to Hull University for my music degree as first planned. Scunthorpe Careers Service went through various options and found that Bretton Hall College was recruiting to its new BA (Hons) Music Course. They rang Bretton Hall up to arrange an interview for me in July, and in that moment, fate stepped in to change the course of my life.

I was the first in our family to enter Higher Education, and when I arrived with my parents, we were bowled over by the beauty and grandeur of the place. My interview for music was held in the Mansion Lecture Theatre with Patric Standford, the Head of Music, with the Inter-arts component being with Alan Brown. I was thrilled and not a little scared when they offered me a



Beauty and Grandeur

place, and I went off to see Joyce Holmes (the then Registrar) for official confirmation and Pauline Foster (the then Housekeeper) to arrange accommodation.

Along with my fellow interviewees on that day, Robert, Val and Nicola, I was allocated one of the last four rooms on campus. These were on the middle floor of Eglinton Hostel (near sick bay) and had never been used for students before. There would just be the four of us.

September arrived as did I and my compatriots. My room on Eglington middle floor was incredibly small and overlooked the music library at the back. Most of the floor space was taken up by the tuba that I had brought with me for my studies. Everyone came in to laugh at how ridiculously small the room was.



Eglington Hostel

After the first term, and several meetings with Pauline Foster, I managed to move into the room at the end of the corridor which seemed incredibly spacious by comparison. I think it was Eglington 8, but the numbering has all changed.

Just off the landing on the middle floor was a room known to us as “The Lounge”. This was a lovely comfortable common room with a TV, and Pauline Foster had said that on no account were we, as students to use it! We did!... and friends in other 'traditional' hostels thought that we in Eglington were getting preferential treatment.

A cleaner called June (we christened her Little Limpy) lived in a room on the bottom floor and an English lecturer on the top floor. We only ever saw June on her regular route from her room to clean the bathroom, clutching a tin of Vim. That bath was scoured so hard that the enamel finish had completely disappeared. Other characters were Mrs. Taylor, our cleaner, from Haigh village, who exhorted us to “feel the suction” on her vacuum, stating that it was “so much better than a Ewbank”. She was an obliging soul who always had time for a gossip. Other rooms were used for College/YSP visitors who were staying for a short time. We were also lucky in having a payphone in there, and in those pre-mobile days, friends and family would ring, and we would have to hoof down the corridors and stairs to see who the call was for, and then try to locate them.



"Working class lad"

For a working class lad from a small town in North Lincolnshire, it felt like I'd 'arrived' in a very different world, although I arrived completely unprepared for college life in as far as home comforts were concerned. My possessions included a knife, fork and tin plate, an old record player with a few LPs, and a crocheted blanket that my Nana had given me.

Horrified at this deprived spectacle, my course and hostel mates Val and Nicola took me shopping in Barnsley for some new clothes to make me look more 'studenty'. We walked across the Deer Park to catch the South Yorkshire-regulated bus to Barnsley which only cost 12p, as opposed to the West Yorkshire-regulated bus from Bretton Village, which cost the extortionate 30p into Wakefield!

We felt like utter sophisticates as we purchased salami and a bottle of white wine from Simco for later consumption. We were lucky enough to have grants and had never felt so rich before. Such delicacies were just for snacks really, as we'd all got a pre-paid meal card which we had to produce for Rita at the till when we went to the canteen. Eventually most people didn't bother to take their card, but trilled out their number. 1276 was mine, I think. The fact that we knew several of the canteen ladies by name is again testament to the friendliness of the place.

The canteen was really a great meeting point and we always came down for an iced bun and a cuppa during the break in our lectures. Meals-wise, egg mornay always seemed to be a favourite as it was regularly on the menu. We were often delayed with our meals as my friends were addicted to the Phoenix video game which resided in the canteen foyer and was all very new in those low tech days of 1982. I remember our Leaver's Dinner held there in 1985. For those special occasions like birthdays, we sallied forth into Barnsley once again to Pinocchio's where the birthday boy/girl was guaranteed a good night, a good meal and a birthday sparkler on their dessert.

I'd anticipated that I would be homesick as I'd never been way from home before. Surprisingly, I felt immediately at home. At Bretton you got to know people quite quickly and we were all doing similar 'creative' courses. Who could fail to feel at home in that beautiful landscape? How many times have I contemplated the meaning of life with a walk round the lake? I have to say that I didn't always appreciate the early-morning vocalizations of the Canada Geese who inhabited the campus, especially after a 'few too many' at Kennel Block.

The academic staff treated you very much as individuals and were always concerned for your welfare. This was especially true for us as the 'guinea pigs' on BA (Hons) Music course where the staff and students were all learning together, as it was a completely new course.

As music students, we were quite cliquy I suppose, and there was often a rolling of eyes at the attire and exclamations of the 'Vis arts' students when we all came together for Inter-Arts on Friday mornings in the Ezra Taylor building, or the Media Centre.

We learned about Nature and industrialisation, Expressionism and lots of other 'isms', but most importantly, it pushed us out of our comfort zones. This shy and retiring young man suddenly found that he could be involved with more dramatic thespian pursuits, and indeed, for one production, we used the Portico Hall itself for a pastiche of an eighteenth century play (complete with costumes). Also, never to be forgotten, was our foray into community arts where a group of us produced and performed an Old Time Musical Hall at various care homes around Wakefield and Barnsley. On one particular day we had two performances to do and were invited to Alan Brown's home for a fish and chip dinner. Inexplicably, we also tried out his home-made wine. Needless to say, we were not expecting such a strong brew, and the afternoon performance was something to behold.

In retrospect, the opportunity to step out of our normal subject area did give us a wider perspective on the arts in general. It also made us work together, and taught us the skills of negotiation. I often think fondly of the things we did which were very innovative at the time and muse on how my appreciation of such things has truly only come to fruition in the years since I have left.

By year two, I had volunteered to be the hostel representative for Swithen, and moved into room 8. The person in the room next door was my good friend Celia Greatorex who would eventually become President of the Student Union, and go on to work in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park itself. There might as well not have been a dividing wall between us, as we spent most of the time in and out of each other's rooms dealing with one drama or another, or just to have a toasted sandwich and a cup of tea. I guess this is true of most University accommodation, but at Bretton, people did seem to get to know and care for each other as I suppose it was somewhat of a 'rarefied' atmosphere. You were always a *person* and never just a number.



Swithen

The chance to participate in and attend concerts was a regular feature of my life there. There were concerts in College Hall, in Bretton Chapel, St John's Church, Wakefield and Wakefield Cathedral. I even played with the brass group for the opening of the Ridings Shopping Centre in 1984.

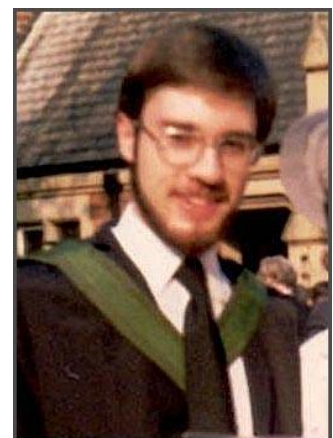


Being part of an orchestra or a choir is like being part of something that is infinitely greater than yourself and has a very spiritual aspect to it. This was particularly noticeable at Christmas. I have only to hear Britten's "Ceremony of Carols" and I am immediately transported back to the Mansion, in darkness, with the ladies of the Bretton Singers processing down the stairs with candles, singing to the harpsichord placed in the Portico Hall. It always brings tears to my eyes. Of course, the mince pies and sherry were an added incentive!

In year two, I moved with my friends David, Ian and Robert to Skelmanthorpe. Luckily, Dave had a car, so we could get lifts in to most lectures with him on most days. There were numerous times, however, when I had to wait at the bus stop in West Bretton for the 484 bus to Holmfirth, which would drop me off on the main street in Skelmanthorpe, ready for my trudge down Station Road. Funny how even the bus number has stuck in my mind.

There are so many memories, and we each have our own treasure store, which we plunder from time to time to find that inexplicable warmth which stems from the familiarity of times past and the people who have formed the fabric of our lives.

Once I'd left Bretton, I moved to Wakefield and have lived there ever since, so I am well-placed for the occasional visit and reminiscence. Many of those with whom I studied are now re-connecting with each other and we have often had online conversations which completely belie the fact that we may not have actually seen each other for almost thirty years. This familial facet of the place is one with which most Brettonites will identify, and in any gathering where there are teachers or musicians or drama folk, you can bet that someone will either have studied there, or who will know someone that has.



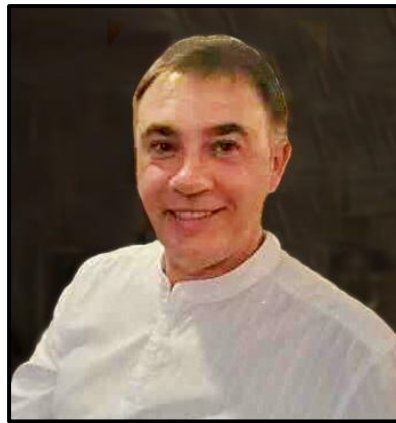
1985

The name of Bretton Hall College commands respect, but for the majority of us who attended, its life and ethos were transformative in both personal and professional terms. As a Higher Education institution, it may no longer exist, but whilst we its graduates survive, it will never be lost and nor will the talent that it nurtured.

I can honestly say that the person who emerged from Bretton Hall College in 1985 was a very different one from the one who entered its gates in 1982, a change that was definitely for the better.

Antony Osborne.

2015



Antony – c. 2015