

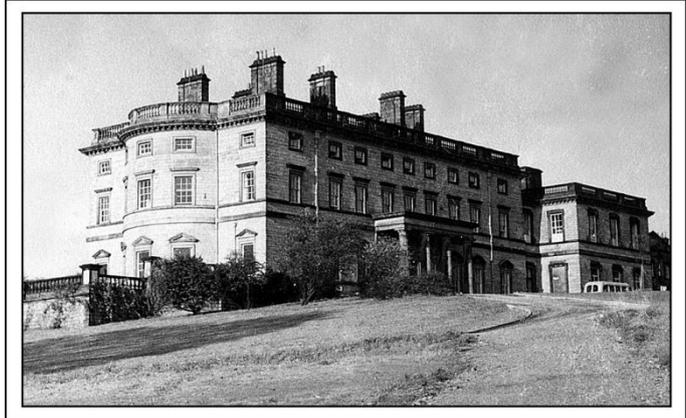
David Wigley

Music

1958-60

"The joy is that so many of the 1958 intake went on to great things".

Bretton Hall. Just to write the two words conjures up a myriad of fantastic, very happy memories of my time as a student there from 1958 until 1960. Singing madrigals with the chamber choir across the lakes on hot summer evenings; playing Haydn and Mozart string quartets under the trees; dressing up in jacket and tie for dinner on most evenings in the Dining Room or in the Adam Room; having just listened to the latest Grace written by one of the music students; jazzing it up in Kennel Block (the student union)



Bretton Hall – c. 1958

on Saturday evenings; donning my DJ for the Christmas Ball and listening to the girls singing Britten's "Ceremony of Carols" on the Flyover.....it goes on forever!

Where to start? I left Cirencester Grammar School in 1956 with a good crop of three Advanced level subjects – Music, English and French. The two principal arts colleges training teachers of arts subjects at that time were Bretton Hall and Trent Park. I was recommended by my head teacher to apply for the former, did so, and was offered a place. National Service was still obligatory for the boys, so I decided to get mine out of the way, and went into the Royal Air Force for two years.



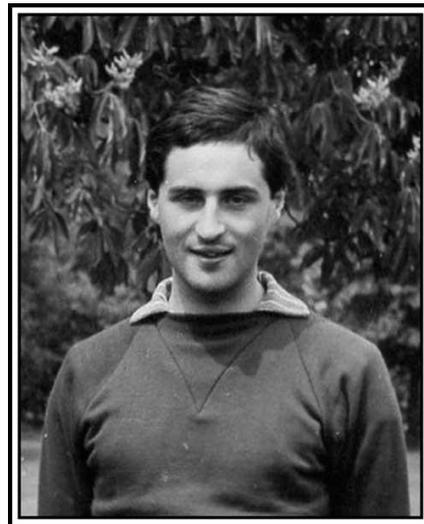
Estate House - 1960

In September, 1958, I arrived at Bretton Hall to start my studies. There were about seventy students in each of the two years, divided into music, drama or art studies, and between secondary and primary training. Most students had dormitories in the mansion house, and slept and studied either there or in Stable Block. A few students slept out in the village with local families. In 1959, Estate House opened in the centre of the village, and about twenty of the boys, including myself, moved there with Charlie Good, the Principal Lecturer in Education.

With a total student body of 140, we were all one huge happy family, though we tended socially to keep within our individual main arts group. At this time, none of the modern student accommodation hostels had been erected: that started in the 1960s.

Life virtually centred around the main mansion house. A typical day followed this pattern: for me, I would be in the music block by 6 a.m. practising my two music studies – the piano and the cello. Full English breakfast was taken in one of the two small dining rooms in the mansion by everyone at 8 a.m. A lecture followed, then a half-hour break for freshly-cooked biscuits and coffee, usually in the open area near Stable Block. There would be another lecture before a full lunch for everyone. Most afternoons comprised further lectures and studies, with another break for freshly-cooked cakes and tea on the trolley at 4 p.m. More studies followed, then we all had to dress formally, the boys in jackets and ties, and the girls in dresses or skirts (no trousers), for a formal three-course dinner with all of the staff present. Dinner was not formal on Wednesdays, Saturdays or Sundays.

The remainder of the evening was taken up with private study, essay-writing and practising our individual art forms.



David Wigley – c. 1958

On Saturday mornings, there was usually a lecture for the entire student body on a common educational theme, followed by a rehearsal by the Choral Society, which comprised most students from all art forms. One Saturday morning lecture was memorable in that a visiting speaker gave a full and graphic talk about the dangers of promiscuous relationships, showing a film detailing the diseases which could be acquired. During the talk, the college Matron walked in smelling of ether, and half a dozen of the toughest members of the college football team fainted en masse.

Wednesday afternoons were free for sports activities, and for activities such as chamber music and drama rehearsals. Sundays were free, though were usually occupied with further private study and rehearsal.



The Spring Term in each year was taken up by teaching practice in schools across Yorkshire. This was not an easy time for anyone. We needed to be out of bed very early, have a quick breakfast, and be ready to board coaches by 7.30 a.m. at the latest in order to get to our schools. Some of us had good schools: some had tough schools. We were constantly assessed by the schools and by visiting tutors from the college. We usually returned to Bretton by about 4.30 p.m. where fresh cakes and tea were waiting. Dinner was informal for the whole

term, and during the evening there was preparation for next day's lessons to be done, together with discussions with our individual tutors about the progress we were making in the classroom.

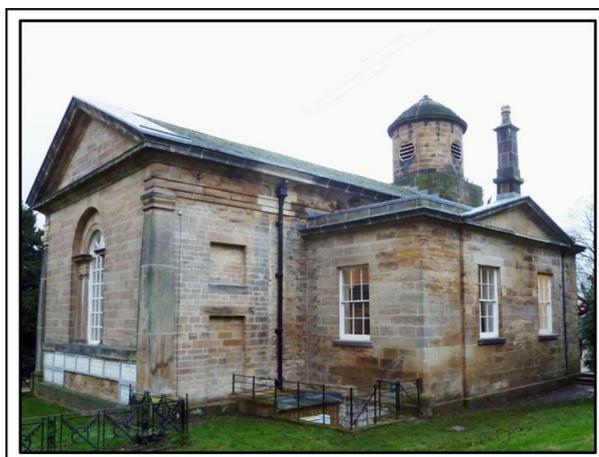
In terms of actual music-making, the opportunities were endless. Handel's "Solomon" and "Messiah"; Britten's "Rejoice in the Lamb"; Bach's "B minor Mass"; Purcell's "Dido and Aeneas" with the choral society, to mention but a few; Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and one of the Mozart piano concerti played by the first orchestra, conducted by Laurence Leonard, then also the music director at Stratford upon Avon; the Mendelssohn and Schubert Octets, the Schubert double cello quintet and "Trout Quintet", and numerous quartets played with other chamber players such as



Outdoor performance of Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas* at Bretton in 1953

Jean Seager, Pete Miller, Vera Swales, Sarah Brown and Tony Wiltshire, all coached by Etain Lovell.

A memorable occasion was when the chapel was reopened in the grounds, having been derelict for many years. Anthems were sung by the chamber choir, and the string orchestra accompanied a Handel organ concerto by Charles Avison, and played Holst's "St. Paul's Suite". At that time, many of the music students had already obtained music diplomas from other music colleges, were very competent practitioners, and this enabled quite challenging choral and instrumental music to be performed.

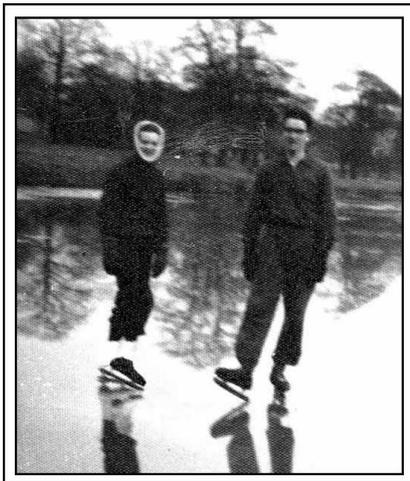


Estate Chapel

So why were the days at Bretton Hall so special? Of course, everything was free. Our rooms were cleaned daily by a cleaning staff, and our bed linen changed weekly. The dining arrangements were of a very high quality, and the food quite exceptional. The Principal, John Friend, was an ex-Cambridge man, and wanted to establish Cambridge standards for working and dining along that model. In addition, many of the students received county grants for private spending money if their parents were less well-off.

Tuition was either on a one-to-one basis or in very small groups of about half a dozen, so that the tutors knew their students very well, and could give first-class advice. The teaching staff was of a very high quality. Martial Rose, Senior Lecturer in Drama, went on to become Principal of King Alfred's College, Winchester. Margaret Dunn, Vice-Principal, had a national reputation as a drama and dance teacher. Gordon Curl, drama and dance teacher, had a national reputation for innovative movement and dance.

Daphne Bird, a delightful Senior Music Lecturer, was known nationally for her developments in music education – and also with the Guide movement. The students were lovely – interesting, interested, often slightly scatty but always focused. The ethos was one of an informal but regulated structure. We all knew what we had to do – what Bach Fugue to prepare, what essay to have in that week, what extended study to be working on – and it was up to us to make sure that we did it. I never remember being hassled by a tutor.

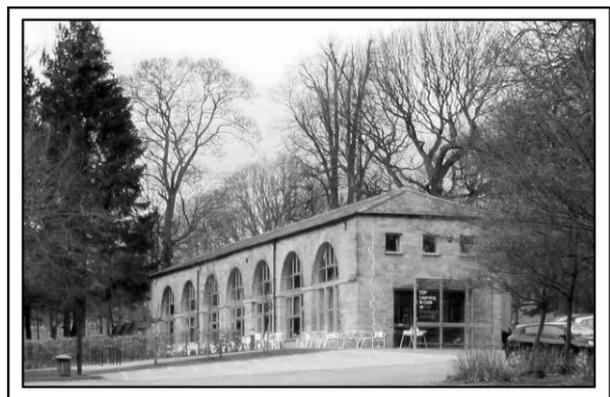


Skating on the frozen lake 1960

The social life was very important. An active student union once led a rebellion with all of the students assembled on the Flyover and in Portico Hall calling for the Principal to come out of his flat to meet us as he wouldn't allow alcohol to be served in the student union. The union itself, in a darkened Kennel Block, allowed students to become very friendly, as did the quiet areas around the lakes; and many of those friendly students eventually married – and still are! During the 1959/1960 winter, the lakes froze over, and skating was very popular. During the summer, we swam in the lakes. In fact, on our very last night as students, the entire 1958 intake joined hands, danced and sang round the building, then stripped off completely and jumped into the lakes.

Visits to the local pubs – or “hostelries” as “Poppa” Friend preferred to call them, when warning us of the evils of drink – were obligatory, and rocky walks back to college usually followed. Most of us smoked. The college societies enabled visiting musicians, theatre workers and dancers to give distinguished recitals. The internationally renowned dancer Geraldine Stephenson was a popular visitor.

The social element prevalent during the late 1950s is reflected in the fact that although there were only 70 students in each year, approximately 20 of the 1958 intake students still meet for lunch each September in Kennel Block in order to exchange reminiscences and pretend that they are still 20 years old. This, despite the fact that at least 10 of the 70 have sadly already passed on. If any of the 1958 intake has not made contact with me, and would like to join us each September, I can be contacted by email on

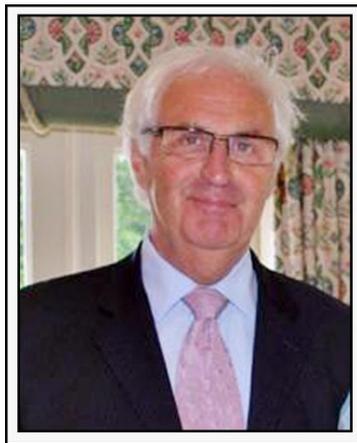


Kennel Block - 2015

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Many of the students at that time, and particularly the music students, went on for further studies, mostly in London. I shared a flat in London with Tony Wiltshire, a former National Youth Orchestra double bass player, who went to Trinity College, and Michael Lewis, who, like me, went on to the Guildhall School. Michael became a distinguished film composer, writing background music for eminent Hollywood films, and living for most of his life in California.

The joy is that so many of the 1958 intake went on to great things, not always in education. Many became head teachers, university professors and lecturers, county advisers, professional musicians, artists and actors, and most were gifted teachers. They have had a huge influence on the arts education of thousands of children in this country over the past half century.



David Wigley - 2015