

Andy Talbot

Drama

1987-90

PGCE student 1991-92

I knew someone from my sixth-form college in Lancashire, who had just completed a few years of the drama course at Bretton. He was full of enthusiasm for the place and aspired to be a sixth form drama teacher. Whilst I hankered after a place at film school, I was unsuccessful for my first eligible year of entry in 1985, I re-sat an A Level and got my place at film school. I guess I lacked confidence to try for the London drama schools, although to 'name drop', I had a twenty minute chat with a younger Gary Oldman, when he visited my college in Wigan to talk about drama schools and I realised that Bretton had a lot to offer and at that time a degree as opposed to a diploma. I tried Bretton again, this time as a late applicant. I ended up with an audition with John Hodgson in his stable block office and my ex Bretton friend from Wigan drove me over there for support. By this time I was well versed in the legends of the Scissett flats and Arthur knew me by name.

There was no room in the Bretton Hall campus hostels in 1987. Some of us went to the old Sheffield Polytechnic hostels at the Wentworth Woodhouse Estate, near Rotherham. My first friend there was Reese Shearsmith. After a few weeks we were told we all had to find accommodation elsewhere as the hostels were due to be demolished in the coming months. They are still there now in 2013! I eventually found a house on Bridge Street, Darton; then Litherop 4 and Swithen 5. In my final year I was an inmate of Grasshopper 1.

As a viola player as well as a 'thesp', I did find the sedate company of music students at Bretton for much of the time. My girlfriend was a music student. So, I was a little on the edge of the world of stable block at times. I'm trying to make up for it now. I was a little short on confidence and you had to metaphorically shout loudest rather than just louder as a drama student. I had good and bad times at Bretton; didn't we all? From being thrown up against wall by a student in a poster war for a room on campus to fall-outs with girlfriends: that was growing up at Bretton. It is those moments that also made the Bretton experience so special.

The amazing thing about Bretton Hall is that we share so much in common with those other student generations from 1947 - 2007. Even the furniture in the hostels was the same for most of that time! That valley, those lakes, the house, the stable block, KB and the staff, they all added to the ethos and experience. Unlike many graduates across the country, we lost that organisation. Bretton Hall College is no more. The building and environment do survive for many generations to come. Our experience and knowledge lives on in its graduates. That is the precious part. I don't wish to be morbid but we also should remember those many students who have passed away since those days and those that sadly died whilst studying there, some of whom are remembered in different ways in the grounds.

Over the years Bretton has led to many new friendships beyond my course. The number of times I have been in a room and someone has introduced me by the line "Andrew went to Bretton". I run the website for ex Bretton playwright John Godber and the Bretton Hall DRAMA Alumni page on Facebook. By the way, check out John Godber's play 'It Started with a Kiss', which is set at

Bretton Hall. Many of my heroes were at Bretton, some I didn't realise went to Bretton but felt an affinity to before finding out the connection. Mark Thomas you are a comedy god! Most of what I know and do as a drama lecturer can be traced back to cold mornings in Workshop Theatre with Dr Peter Harrop et al. I believe part of keeping Bretton Hall College's name alive is to celebrate and support its legacy within the Arts and Education. We are that legacy. It has made us who we are and it has opened doors to opportunities. In turn many of us are also involved in providing opportunities for another generation.