

Malcolm S. Bentley

Music

1963-66

CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS AT ESTATE HOUSE

I was fortunate enough to attend Bretton Hall during the time which I considered its heyday. [September 1963 – July 1966] It had begun to expand from what it was originally envisaged by the then Director of Education for the old West Riding of Yorkshire – Sir Alec Clegg. His vision was to establish a specialist “Arts” College. As far as I remember the original college offered courses for students in Music, Art and Drama, but by 1963 it was enlarging its scope and Maths and Science subjects were added.

In 1963 the college owned what was called the Estate House, which was in the village of West Bretton, about a mile’s walk from the college itself. Most of the first year students were given accommodation in the old buildings (Stable Block and the main building itself), but approximately 15 of the first year students were allocated to Estate House for their accommodation.



Estate House

Along with Ken Stott, Geoff Singleton and Steve (surname forgotten) I shared a room downstairs in the building. Ken, Geoff and I were all music students, whilst Steve was an arts student. The Estate House students soon morphed into a recognizable group due to their accommodation being removed from the college itself, and as a result of this they became a bit more adventurous than those students who were under the closer scrutiny of staff residing in the college.

A resident tutor (Revd Percy Frank Atherton) had a room in the Estate House, but only seemed to be present at night time when he slept there.

I remember we had a fairly large common room in Estate House, and by the end of our first term at Bretton we decided that we would like to decorate this room for Christmas and obtain a real live Christmas tree to take pride of place in the common room.

One or two of the Estate House Students were the proud possessors of rather ancient and decrepit cars, and although they managed somehow to afford to run their vehicles, money was tight, so it was obvious that they could not afford to purchase a Christmas tree. There was, however, a veritable forest of Christmas Trees not very far from Estate House, and so it was that one cold dark winter's night a group of students, armed with shovels, pick axes and various other digging implements, and dressed from head to toe in black, set off in one of the ancient vehicles to acquire a "free" Christmas tree.

Now half a dozen or maybe more students, in an average size family saloon is already a bit overloaded, but it didn't dampen their spirits. They eventually pulled up at the side of the road and after a quick "recce" selected what they thought would be a good-sized tree to take back to Estate House. They were well on the way to felling it when someone shouted, "There's a police car coming!"

I don't think students have ever dispersed so quickly, leaving the owner of the car innocently standing by the side of it when the police car pulled up. After some discussion the owner of the car persuaded the police that the car had broken down and he was waiting for help to tow the car away. It was quite some time before the intrepid lumberjacks returned to continue their felling. Eventually the tree was felled and loaded into the car across the back seat, the students also piled in and wended their way cautiously back to Estate House with the trophy now sticking out of the rear offside of the car by about five feet!

It was unloaded and dragged ceremoniously into the common room of Estate House and erected in all its full glory. The only problem was that in their haste to obtain the tree no one had taken into account that the common room in Estate House was only about eight feet tall, whilst the tree was about twelve feet tall. Discussions took place about returning the tree and getting a smaller one, but in the end common sense prevailed and they kept the original tree.

Imagine if you will the look on the resident tutor, Frank Atherton's face when he entered the common room next morning to be greeted by a Christmas tree which not only reached to the ceiling, but also spread about four feet along it too!



Rev. P. F. Atherton

Malcolm S Bentley (Music Student 1963 – 1966)