

Keswick Hall College of Education: Miss Pearson Looks Back: 1944 -1972

This article was originally published in the Keswick Hall Old Students' Club magazine, December 1997

*Miss Pearson has been retired for 25 years.
Here she gives us some of her thoughts on her time at College.*

LOOKING BACK IN THE 90's

Looking back over a period of 53 years since I first went to Norwich Training College, I see a whole range of changes, both educational and social, which have been reflected in the national scene. My 28 years in the College covered many of these changes.

It was still war-time when I was offered the post in Norwich, and trying to get my acceptance through to Miss Duff, I had to wait for an hour in a blacked-out Liverpool Street Station – not daring to leave the phone – until they could get through to Norwich. Wartime conditions still prevailed when I arrived: blackout, food-rationing, no petrol for School Practice, and a great shortage of materials. We became adept at improvisation. Enemy attacks had virtually ceased, but we still heard a few doodlebugs and rockets in the area.

The College had been destroyed, and the fact that students lived in houses, in close proximity to resident Staff created a close-knit community with a great sense of camaraderie. Deprivation of what are now accepted as essential adjuncts to teaching was taken for granted and coped with as a matter of course. At that time, animals shared the community with Staff and students. Many of these, we thought, displayed the characteristics of their owners. Some will remember Miss Grierson's stolid Diana, Miss Pratt's sagacious and intelligent Nelson, Miss French's aristocratic and remote Jeremy, and Miss Farrell's bull-terrier Bruce, whose pugnacity was concealed behind a benign exterior.

Though rules were comparatively tight (students had to be in by 10.00p.m.), the general feeling was one of freedom; visitors, boy-friends, parents and friends were all welcomed. Though small in numbers, we were not insular. Our choir was asked to sing in the Cathedral, Carol Pageants started in Norwich, (St. Gregory's), we had the occasional expeditions when we could afford it, and we entertained an American University Doctor, who presented to our denuded Library, a large gift of books. Educational methods were moving from the formal to "freer expression" and "Look-and-say" reading practice, and to individual, rather than class-teaching – innovations not always popular in the schools.

Hope for the future was boosted by the acquisition of Keswick Hall, which was (almost) ready for occupation in 1947. Students and builders worked together in happy co-existence for about six weeks. Only one marriage can be recorded as a result. Managing a College in two parts created a challenge for the organisation. The gym was still in Norwich, and our own transport could not accommodate a whole year, so cycles had to be used to supplement. The Staff shuttled in cars. Moving day was chiefly remembered by (a) the sight of a fleet of removal vans spilling their contents on to the front drive in Keswick – the most motley collection of secondhand, makeshift and donated furniture you ever saw, which we had had to find to replace that lost in the fire, and (b) finding Staff on their hands and knees helping to prepare students' rooms, right up to the point of their arrival.

Life in the "country" was punctuated by domestic incidents; – cows loose in the front garden, at night; a "streaker" in the bushes in the lane; – a hornet's nest discovered in the living quarters on the day of the students' return; – and a call from a domestic helper late one Saturday night, after a dance, saying that the Air Force visitors had "roughed up" her son. They had also roughed up the College toilets, which were cleaned up by the girls, who accepted it as one of life's little hazards. (I remember particularly, Rachael Nendick's calm acceptance of the event.)

The College intake broadened to include groups of Mature Students, which added a welcome balance to the age groups. A group of Mature Students was established in Belstead House – Ipswich. Scandinavian students came to visit us, from connections made on a College trip to Denmark, and we accepted a number of foreign students from different parts of the world. Who can forget the fiercely nationalistic Alice (related to the Kabaka of Buganda) who went around carrying everything on her head, (including the occasional solitary bottle of ink!)

The prospect of increased numbers, and a mixed College gradually found acceptance in our forward planning, and the day the men arrived, after much careful preparation for their welcome, passed off successfully. The men, of course, brought with them much more sophisticated technology, a broader and more earthy sense of humour, (the girls’ entertainments were often skilled and sensitive), and their desire for greater independence was established in the form of a Students’ Union, with its own buildings and finances. The College programme began to include a weekly meeting between Staff and Student representatives, where there was constant gentle pressure from the students for greater freedoms. Mutual agreement usually resulted, and mutual respect was generated.

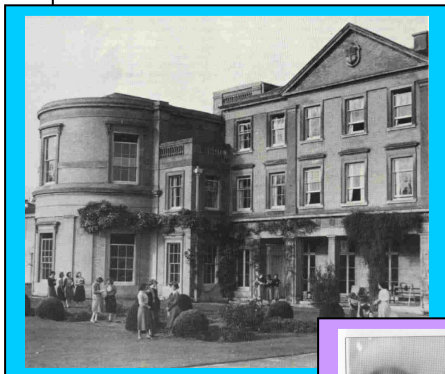
The increased College included wider connections, frequent exchanges with Staff and students from the U.S., and student expeditions became more adventurous, including a Geography trip to Iceland. Educational, social and cultural contacts were extended, and programmes became more varied, including courses for Post-Graduate students.

My last years in College, up to 1972 saw a period of stabilisation for a short time, before the rumours of the restructuring of teacher education and the amalgamation of institutions began to penetrate.

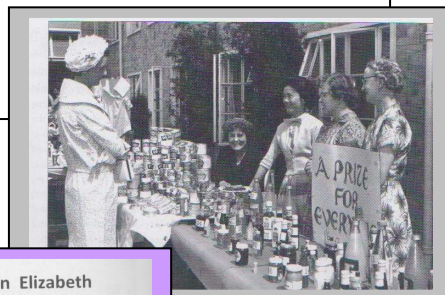
If I were asked to pick out events that remain the memory of my years in College, first on the list would be the opening of the East Wing by the Queen (now Queen-Mother) in 1951: the dedication of the Chapel by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, in 1963. Others include the “Songs of Praise” arranged with the BBC – the opening of a large fund-raising event in the park by Leslie Crowther – and the day when the students felt they must make a protest, (on a subject which escapes me), at the City Hall. We were intrigued to find that they had discarded what had become their normal “casual” wear, and joined the march to the City Hall in formal clothes.

I can remember clearly saying at Miss Duff’s leaving party in 1964, that there was no doubt at all that the College would become more academically and administratively efficient, which it certainly did, – but that if the principles and quality of life she upheld were to fade, we should be the losers. In actual fact, what she promoted did continue under the wise leadership of John Gibbs and Bill Etherington – mutual trust remained firmly established, and I think that most folk who spent some time in the College will remember it as a place of warm goodfellowship, where the focus was on the individual, and where high academic standards were combined with a practical, liberal and sensitive approach to training.

NORA PEARSON



1955 Summer Fete 1953



In 1947 Queen Elizabeth visits Keswick Hall to lay the foundation stone for the new College