

Reflections of a 1970's Resident: David Ewart

The 1970s is not only the decade that fashion forgot, but also the decade Churchill Hall may rather forget, but this was not what I found when I came up to Bristol to read economics in October of 1974. I moved into a shared study bedroom in the then Waltham House, with a gas fire and ring, no central heating but lots of space.

Churchill Hall was very different, from what I have read about, in the early 1960s or today. It was still all male, had the three outhouses, Holmes, Waltham and Claverton, with no M-R Houses, which were not added till the 1980s; and the Botanic Gardens were not in the Holmes grounds, but there was a very enjoyable croquet lawn. Mr Caine, the Hall's legendary steward and ex butler of the Holmes was still around, but I think only a shadow of his former self. Formal meals had been reduced to lunch on Sundays, which was not taken very seriously.

The autumn of 1974 was a strange time, although the power cuts, as a result of the miner's strike, were over, (part of my A Level revision, particularly for my mocks, had been by candle-light) but random shortages remained, there were strikes leading to such things as there being no bread at breakfast for several days. As I arrived the second general election of that year was coming to a conclusion, the last time we were looking at a minority government. Bristol was also changing, having lost its City and County status, and with the closure of the City Docks.

When I arrived, the Warden was Roy Parker, but in my three years there would be three Wardens, Arthur Graves, the Warden of Wills covering the 1975-76 year and Alan Rump arriving in the autumn of 1976. Although he looked young then, even to a student, little did I realise that over 30 years later he would still be Warden, even though by then he was also Director of Student Services.

To many people Churchill was at a low point in the early/mid 1970s. Single sex halls were not very popular, the Hall had moved into a rather informal period, compared with the previous style, the one formal meal not being taken very seriously, and very few hall events - the Hall balls and the like coming later. Social life seemed to centre on the bar, or television room in the JCR, without much else happening. However, I found Churchill a marvelous place to be, making lifelong friends. I deeply enjoyed the hall experience and found Churchill the perfect base for my time at Bristol. I moved into a single room in The Holmes, complete with a large walk-in safe, for my second year, although returning a few years ago I found that my room was now part of the conference kitchen area.

During my time at Churchill the Monica Will's Chapel was at its most active, with the chaplains, Rev Don Warner and later Rev Stephen Abbott, living in The Holmes, and a very active body of students in Churchill and other Halls. Later, after my time, this body became The Fellowship of the King, in Redland, which is still going.

Looking back over what seems an unbelievable 40 years, I still find a longing for those years in what I consider to be the best hall in Bristol.