

## **Open Forum 01(1982)**

**Transmission date:** 18 July 1982

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### **Wynne Brindle**

The 1982 setting for Walton Hall – the very heart of The Open University. A far cry from its appearance in 1969. The dilapidated hall stood amid fields and woodlands secluded to the point of being forgotten. The only other building on the estate – the 14<sup>th</sup> century St Michael's Church – was equally in need of restoration and only in occasional use. The overgrown drive seemed an unlikely approach to a new and Open University.

The first task was to make the hall weatherproof and habitable, whilst over on the west side, low rise blocks were being built for the first academic staff already involved in producing the first foundation courses. All new building was to be in brick – relatively cheap and available straight from the Bedfordshire kilns nearby.

The second priority was to provide temporary accommodation for the library, an essential backup for academics working under pressure. There were few concessions to architectural style – rapid construction and basic convenience were the order of the day. Foundations were already appearing for the laboratories – urgently needed to develop the first home experiment kits for the science foundation course. The only planning protection was given to the rose garden at the side of the hall and the mature trees on the estate.

The hall itself had a special destiny after its restoration, to house the top people. Some minor refurbishing of the entrance hall created a main reception area. Unchanged but beautifully restored was the original 19<sup>th</sup> century, finely carved, oak staircase. This led to the principal offices on the first floor for the Vice-Chancellor, the University Secretary and their supporting staff.

The first occasion to attract the press to Walton Hall was the visit of Lord Mountbatten, who was invited to open the now completed new buildings, which were already in use. He was received by The Open University's first Chancellor, Lord Crowther, the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Planning Committee, Sir Peter Venables and the Vice-Chancellor. The minister given responsibility by Harold Wilson for launching the University, Jennie Lee, was among the guests.

### **Lord Crowther**

Lord Mountbatten, Pro-Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, my lords, ladies and gentlemen; we are met here this morning to mark the formal completion of the first phase of the construction of this permanent home for The Open University. Now it might at first sight seem odd that an institution whose habitat is the air, which only narrowly escaped being called The University of the Air, should need a local habitation as well as a name. I suppose that when the idea of an Open University was first mooted the natural assumption might have been that it would occupy a few floors of some anonymous office building in London. That may have been the natural assumption but it was clearly the wrong one. We are not a society for the propagation of this or for the abolition of that, we are, we will be and we are, one of the

great permanent institutions of the country, and though our nature is inevitably largely aerial, electronic, invisible, we must put down a toe on earth somewhere.

We count it a great privilege to be able to have Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Mountbatten of Burma to perform this dedication ceremony for us. We are greatly honoured by his presence. Lord Mountbatten.

**Lord Mountbatten**

Mr Chancellor, Mr Pro-Chancellor, Mr Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen; I am indeed honoured to be invited to open The Open University but it is at first puzzle, how one could make an open university more open than its name already implies. But I gather it is the buildings that house the staff and the means of dissemination of programmes that are to be opened today and I am proud to perform the opening ceremony.

This is a test of technology, will the strings work?