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Matthew Frear (2005-2013)

I arrived at CREES in 2005 with the intention of just taking a career break to indulge my interest in Russia and Eastern Europe for a year on the Masters programme. Little did I know at the time I would end up staying for eight years and developing an expertise on Belarusian politics and society!

My memories of CREES include Tanya pointing out all the Russian grammar I'd been using incorrectly for over a decade (why had nobody told me before then?); sharing the pleasure and pain of writing a PhD with other CREESnik doctoral researchers; laughing until I cried at the CREES conference in Cumberland Lodge (in the bar, not at panel presentations I hasten to add!); teaching modules with colleagues who a few years earlier had been teaching those same modules to me as a student myself; the unique delights of the Staff Bar; the saga of the move from the ERI Building (goodbye 3rd floor and atrium) to the Muirhead Tower (hello 6th floor and views towards Birmingham city centre); discovering the wonders of Belarus on fieldwork and language training; appreciating the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach and the chance to engage with the policy community; a glass or two of the traditional fizzy wine with Dave and Kasia after surviving my viva; having the opportunity to shoehorn Belarus into various modules I've taught over the last couple of years as a visiting lecturer; curating the @CREESBham Twitter account; and of course the unstinting help and support of Tricia and Marea who make sure CREES runs smoothly.

CREES has provided a great foundation for my recent move to a new post at Leiden University in the Netherlands as an Assistant Professor covering Russian and Eurasian politics. As another 'Face of CREES' reminded me however, you never truly leave CREES and I look forward to maintaining my links to fellow CREESniki for many years to come. Here's to the next 50 years!

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