A HISTORY OF THE INFORMATION SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

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MELANIE BENSON

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Abstract

Background
The Information School at Sheffield will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its founding in 2013. Some literature exists on different eras or aspects of the School’s history, but it has not previously been fully documented. The current literature is generally formal and factual in nature, and includes little personal recollection or opinion.

Aims
The study aims to document the history of the Information School from its founding to the present day, and to chart its evolution and growth. It aims to describe the development of the department’s academic programmes and research areas, and to ascertain the particular strengths and distinguishing characteristics of the School. A secondary aim is to record the memories of key figures in the School’s history.

Methods
The primary methodology used is the oral history method. This method was chosen due to its value in collecting large quantities of varied information in a less formal manner. It was also judged to be a novel approach to the subject, given the apparent lack of similar studies using the methodology. Eighteen former and present staff members were interviewed. Desk research was also undertaken.

Results
Interviewees provided information on a wide range of topics regarding the School’s history. Interviews were transcribed and a loose thematic analysis was applied to the data gathered.

Conclusions
The history and development of the School over the last 50 years is documented. The first part of the study gives a descriptive account of important events, in phases from the 1960s to 2000 and beyond. The second part of the study analyses the distinguishing characteristics of the School. These include its research, teaching, international reputation,
and practical focus. Graduate destinations are discussed and the future of the School considered. Some limitations of the study are noted.
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Introduction

Research aims and objectives

The research aim of this study is to document the history of the University of Sheffield’s Information School over the last fifty years as a descriptive account, including the recollections of key figures in the School’s history. A particular strength of the department is the quality and diversity of research, as evidenced by the School’s top ranking in every Research Assessment Exercise (Willett, 2011), so this dissertation will aim to describe these contributions in the context of the development of the discipline of Library and Information Science. The structure of the dissertation takes the form of a monograph: the first part follows a chronological format with sections describing historical events, and the second part examines some key characteristics of the department.

Objectives:
- To document the history of the Information School, from its founding in 1963 to the present day
- To chart the evolution and growth of the School, and note significant changes in organisation, focus and ethos that have occurred over the past 50 years
- To describe the academic history of the School, its curricular development and its research areas
- To ascertain the particular strengths and distinguishing characteristics of the School
- To record the memories of key figures in the School’s history

Significance

To coincide with the 50th anniversary of the School’s founding, staff in the department felt that it would be a valuable and worthwhile undertaking to document its history. As the leading library and information science department in the UK, it is a matter of significance that Sheffield’s history should be recorded. The history of the School has not previously been recorded in one full and comprehensive account; several articles have
described the development of the School at various times or detailed the work of particular research groups, but a complete and broad-ranging history has not previously been written. In addition, the oral history methodology has not been widely used in historical analysis of the LIS sector, so this research represents a novel approach to the subject. The use of this methodology will also ensure that the informal memories and views of key figures in the School are recorded for posterity, to enrich and expand upon the purely factual information that is presented.
Literature Review

Foundation of the Information School – context and aims

Founded in 1963 as the Postgraduate School of Librarianship, the department was funded by donations from the University Grants Committee and an initial contribution from the Sheffield Town Trustees (Saunders, 1964); Sheffield was chosen as the location for the nation’s second such school due to its impressive university library and the excellent facilities and support afforded by the university and the local public library system (Mathers, 2005; Saunders, 1964). Under the leadership of Wilfred Saunders, the School aimed to provide high calibre graduates with a university-standard education in the principles and practice of library and information work, drawing on the expertise of other departments in the university to educate its students in the various skills and disciplines required. Accompanying this was the desire that research in the department should flourish (Saunders, 1964); at the time, very little research was being undertaken in the area (Saunders, 1979).

The local context of industry and scientific research informed, in part, one of the key aims of the new school: the desire to attract a high proportion of graduates in scientific and technological fields to support professional information needs in these areas (Mathers, 2005; Saunders, 1964). A key influence on the School’s early ethos came from the network of library and information science departments in the USA, notably in the desire to educate students in the use of computer technology (Saunders, 1964).

Curriculum development and change

The initial Diploma in Librarianship comprised two areas of specialisation: one in general librarianship, and one in scientific and industrial information work (Saunders, 1989). The latter emphasised the use of information technology and would provide the foundation for Sheffield’s specialisation in the area of information science (Saunders, 1989). In 1968 the Diploma was upgraded to MA/ MSc status and in 1973 the MA in Information Studies (Social Sciences) was introduced, setting the stage for continuous revision of the
department’s courses in accordance with the changing information landscape (Saunders, 1989; Wilson, 1989). Continuing education initiatives and professional engagement were also hallmarks of the School’s development (Saunders, 1989; 1964). Having added “…and Information Science” to its title in 1967, in 1981 the School was renamed as the Department of Information Studies; the first undergraduate programmes were introduced from 1993. In 2010 the department renamed itself the Information School, becoming the first UK member of iSchools, “a consortium of the world’s leading library and information science departments dedicated to advancing the information field in the twenty-first century” (Willett, 2011: 125).

Key research areas and projects

The reputation of the school’s research program has enabled it to attract high levels of funding (Saunders, 1989; 1979) and it has constantly been ranked the best department nationally for research in the area, establishing “an international reputation for research excellence” (Willett, 2011: 125). By the late 1980s three key research groups had been set up: the Chemical Patents Retrieval Group, the Computational Information Retrieval Group, and the Consultancy and Research Unit; the last of these was formed from the pioneering Centre for Research on User Studies, an area in which the School has enjoyed a high reputation (Beaulieu, 2003; Saunders, 1989). Chemoinformatics has comprised an important area of research in the School, initiated by Professor Michael Lynch (Bishop et al., 2003; Saunders, 1979), and has received extensive industrial sponsorship (Mathers, 2005). The area of information retrieval has historically been a further strength of the department (Willett, 2003; Lynch & Willett, 1987); other key areas of research include health informatics, educational training and informatics (Levy et al., 2003; Saunders, 1979), and a wide range of topics in the field of librarianship (Saunders, 1979). More recently, knowledge management and information systems have come to the fore. The research interests and achievements of the department will form a significant part of this study.
Other historical accounts

The history of the University of Sheffield has been documented in two volumes (Mathers, 2005; Chapman, 1955); the former in particular will provide some guidance regarding structure and style. Saunders’ (1964) account of the founding of the School contains much valuable information and insight regarding the early days, including the initial structure of the department and its courses. This article is notable for its discussion of the aims of the School in both teaching and research, and will form a useful starting point for describing the historical context and early years of the School. A second article by Saunders (1989), written at the time of the School’s 25th anniversary, provides a retrospective of how the department developed in that time, examining the original “aspirations and intentions” with hindsight (194). This piece describes how the department’s programmes of study changed and how various research groups originated and evolved, as well as describing continuing education initiatives within the School and the contributions made by members of staff and students. More detail regarding the School’s research programmes can be found in Saunders’ article of 1979, which provides historical perspective on early research endeavours and significant projects throughout the first fifteen years of the department.

Accounts of the history and development of other library and information science departments in the UK and USA will also be consulted. Burton’s (2007) account of the University of Strathclyde’s library and information science programmes is brief, but descriptive, as is Stephen’s (2012) history of the Manchester Library School. Robinson and Bawden’s (2010) article recounts the history and growth of the Department of Information Science at City University, although it focuses mostly on the development of the various courses offered by the department, and contains little descriptive material regarding the progress of the department itself. This analysis is set within the wider context of educational and professional change in the discipline, describing and evaluating changes in the curriculum and external influences upon these. A similar focus is taken in an article by Rowley et al. (1993), which covers the academic programmes at Manchester Polytechnic in detail; it is, however, more descriptive and includes less analysis of the broader issues that impact upon curricular change or departmental ethos. Correspondingly, Wilson’s (1989) piece describes the evolution of the MSc in Information Management at the University of Sheffield, and the influence of the external information landscape on the development of the course.
Turning to the US, Flood (2000) describes in similar detail the founding, structure and content of one particular information science degree course at Drexel University, set against the research context of the time. An account by Bates (2004) covers the social context of the 1960s and how it influenced the development of the department and courses at the University of California at Berkeley; it is a more personal reflection but also covers significant figures in the department’s history. Bunge (1975) offers a descriptive account of the early years of the University of Wisconsin Library School, including material on student statistics, specialist programmes and continuing education in the department, and faculty research interests. A publication by Richardson (1982) goes into extensive detail regarding the founding and early years of the Graduate Library School at Chicago, with particular emphasis upon “the development of the graduate library school concept” (144). A special issue of the Ex Libris Association newsletter covers the history of LIS education in Canada, giving detailed insight into the development of various institutions’ evolution and academic programmes (Land et al., 2004). The history of information science at the University of Pittsburgh is recounted by Aspray (1999) and again mapped to the broader information science landscape. This account is important as it examines the shifting balance of priorities between theory and research on one side, and teaching and practice on the other, a theme which is also apparent in pieces by Flood (2000) and Bowles (1999) and has clear application to the department at the University of Sheffield.

Another significant aspect of Aspray’s (1999) piece is its use of the oral history methodology, which does not appear to have been used extensively in documenting the history of library and information science. Bjorner and Ardito (2003) make use of this methodology to narrate the early history of online information, but reproduce the interviews verbatim rather than extracting information and constructing a descriptive account. The Chemical Heritage Foundation’s Oral History Program features a project on scientific and technical information systems (2010); transcripts are not freely available, but the material would seem to follow a similar format of simply transcribing interviews, presumably with some editing.
Methodology

Oral history

Due to the nature of the data to be collected, the oral history method was the main methodology used in this study; it is a useful method of collecting “spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews” (Ritchie, 1995: 1). The nature of the existing literature on the Information School was found to be generally formal and factual, with little personal recollection or opinion, so the principal advantage of the oral history methodology was that it could provide information that may not have been deemed suitable or relevant for inclusion in formal reports. This kind of information can provide a useful counterpoint to more traditional academic sources, focusing on perceptions rather than straightforward facts and thereby adding colour to an account (Ritchie, 1995: 95). However, the corresponding drawback of this is that an oral history can be highly subjective on the parts of both interviewer and interviewee, and the interviewer, as part of the interview process, may themselves inadvertently influence the information collected (Hoopes, 1979). Furthermore, recollections may be unreliable and difficult to verify, or may be biased or incomplete (Ritchie, 1995). When using the oral history methodology for this study, it was important to bear these issues in mind and ensure that they were mitigated as far as possible in the final report. Factual recollections from interviewees, such as names and dates, were checked against other sources to ensure accuracy, and the oral history methodology was supplemented with desk research to present a more holistic picture: as noted by one historian, such interviews are valuable, “but only if used in careful conjunction with more conventional sources like documents and... records.” (Burns, quoted in Ritchie, 1995: 7)
Interview planning

This research involved interviews with key present and former academic, administrative and support staff who were judged to be important figures in the development of the School. Interviewees were chosen on the basis of their experience and perceived historical significance, with advice from the project supervisor and other interviewees. Initial contact was made via email, and interviews were conducted in person where practicable, with some undertaken via telephone or email. As the dissertation forms a historical account, interviews were conducted, as far as possible, in order of chronology. This generally ensured that early interviews could inform subsequent interviews in terms of questions and subject matter. Where possible, “gatekeepers” were also interviewed early in the process: those individuals who were likely to provide good overview information and suggestions or links to further sources of material (Ritchie, 1995: 62).

Practicalities

Contacting and recruiting interviewees was not always straightforward, with candidates exhibiting varying degrees of responsiveness and availability. Interview lengths varied considerably, depending on the range and strength of interviewees’ recollections. Interviews conducted in person were recorded as audio files. Other interviews were conducted via email or telephone, with the resulting practicalities to consider: with these methods, it can be more difficult to build a rapport and the absence of non-verbal cues can pose difficulties for the interviewer. For email interviews, the interviewee had time to reflect on their reply, which proved advantageous when attempting to document memories, but also may have produced a less spontaneous response; this was borne in mind when analysing the interviews.

As audio recording was the main method used to record interviews, it was necessary to ensure technical reliability. Equipment was tested for functionality and clarity before each interview, and files were checked and backed up immediately afterwards. Brief notes were made during face-to-face interviews to keep track of topics covered and key facts, and to note new questions as they occurred. Note taking also “provides a useful
nonverbal way of communicating with the interviewee” and helps the interviewer “to concentrate, to listen and to remember” (Hoopes, 1979: 89).

**Interview structure and technique**

Basic research was conducted before each interview, to ascertain fundamental information regarding the interviewee’s individual history and potential topics of discussion. This ensured that time was not wasted during interviews establishing basic facts that could have been researched in other ways. As Ritchie notes, “[i]nterviewees become impatient with interviewers whose questions show they do not know the subject matter” (1995: 59). Background research also allows the interviewer to guide the interview and prompt the interviewee if necessary, keeping the interview moving smoothly. A list of questions was prepared in advance, and a modified version of this was sent to interviewees to allow them to start thinking about the material.

The interviews utilised a semi-structured approach, posing a series of open questions to the interviewee and including extra subsequent questions as appropriate. Closed questions were also used, although mainly for the purpose of establishing facts. Interviews began with general queries regarding the interviewee’s involvement with the department, to establish the scope of the interview and likely further questions. It was important that these questions should be reasonably broad in scope, but not so broad that the interviewee would be overwhelmed. More specific questions were also included, tailored to the individual’s experience: sample questions might be “What would you say were your main achievements as Head of School?” or “Could you tell me about the MSc Information Systems course?”. New, detailed questions also arose during interviews, and ensuing questions occasionally needed to be modified according to the interviewee’s responses. Due to the nature of the research and the wide range of information gathered, the interview approach was flexible and adaptable. In qualitative interviewing such as this, the focus is on “what the interviewee sees as relevant and important” and it is entirely possible that the direction of the interview will change according to the interviewee’s perspective and emphasis (Bryman, 2001: 313); this occurred with reasonable frequency. While it was important to cover a range of topics, it was also necessary to be flexible when interviewees were unable or unwilling to talk about particular subjects. Early questions and
answers addressed factual events, allowing interviewees time to ‘warm up’, start the process of reminiscence, and establish a rapport. Interviews then moved on to more subjective material; questions such as “How would you sum up the strengths of the School?” and “How has the ethos of the department changed over time?” required more consideration on the part of interviewees.

When interviewing, it is important to put interviewees at ease, to listen to their responses, to respect their opinions, and to “encourage candid responses” (Ritchie, 1995: 57). Listening skills are vital; the interviewer should be able to judge the tone of the interview and “[change] gears” as appropriate (Ritchie, 1995: 69). In some cases interviewees were very forthcoming and moved the conversation along with ease; others required more guidance and specific questions in order to elicit their memories and opinions. Some interviewees were hesitant or found it difficult to recall certain information; it was essential to put these interviewees at ease and strike the right balance between gently probing for more information and knowing when to move on to another topic. However, as Ritchie (1995) notes, interviewers must remain neutral and avoid framing questions in suggestive or loaded terms; interviewees’ responses should be guided entirely by their own opinions.

To supplement the interview material, desk research was undertaken from the department’s administrative records and archives, including annual reports, staff and student handbooks, degree programme outlines, and dissertation projects. Journal articles and editorials formed another important source of information. Several unpublished sources are cited in the dissertation; these are personal written recollections from former staff members, and were provided by interviewees. A loose thematic analysis was applied to the data gathered, due to the detailed and wide-ranging nature of the information collected.

A note on citation

In the following report, where initials are used for in-text citations, this indicates an interview conducted by the author. These interviews are not cited in the bibliography, but an appendix of abbreviations is provided. Some interviewees chose to remain anonymous; where these interviewees are cited, the abbreviation SM (Staff Member) is used.
The terms ‘School’ and ‘Department’, where capitalised, refer directly to the Information School. The choice of term used depends on the time period being referred to, and whether the department was designated as ‘School’ or ‘Department’ at that time.
History of the Information School

Founding of the School

In 1960 the University of Sheffield was asked to consider the establishment of a postgraduate school of librarianship. At the time, there was only one other postgraduate school, situated at University College London; aspiring librarians could otherwise study at one of the country’s twelve library schools in the Further Education sector, and sit the Library Association exams. It was in fact the Library Association who made the initial proposal regarding the Sheffield School; the President at that time, B. S. (Tony) Page, made a semi-official visit to Sheffield’s University Librarian, James Tolson, which was followed up by a formal letter of proposal to the University’s Vice-Chancellor. The University Senate produced a report, which was then presented and approved by the University Grants Committee in May 1961. The Committee conferred two initial grants: one to improve the University’s stock of literature on librarianship, and one to enable the refurbishment of new premises for the School. Despite the general lack of funding being experienced by UK universities at the time, the University was happy to endow the new School with a large portion of its budget for new posts for the 1963-64 academic year. The Sheffield Town Trustees also donated funds, providing not only monetary aid but “tangible evidence of ‘town’ goodwill”, as Wilfred Saunders stated (Saunders, 1964: 106).

Sheffield was seen as an ideal location for a new School for several reasons. In addition to the support of the University as a whole, the School would have access to “one of the finest, if not the finest, university library buildings in this country” (Saunders, 1964: 106). The city also boasted an excellent, supportive public library system and proximity to the National Lending Library for Science and Technology at Boston Spa, as well as to the major cities of Leeds and Manchester. The SINTO (Sheffield Interchange Organisation) information partnership, which brought together scientific and industrial libraries in the region, was also beneficial, particularly given the proposed specialisation of the new School in scientific and technical information work.

The University initially proposed that the School should be housed in the Arts Tower, which was under construction at the time (ML, 2012). However, the new department found a home in 16 Claremont Crescent (Figure 1), a refurbished Victorian house dating from 1888, and situated in close proximity to the main University buildings.
and library, next to the Royal Hallamshire Hospital. Michael Lynch recalls watching, from his room in Claremont Crescent, the foundations of the large hospital block being dug across the road (ML, 2012). Joan Friedman recollected that “women students were asked not to wear stiletto heels, which would bore holes in the shining new vinyl floors” (Friedman, n.d.). Being located in such a house contributed to the feeling that the department, in those early days, had something of a family atmosphere.

Wilfred Saunders took up the post of Director in April 1963. An economist by training, he had served at Dunkirk during the Second World War, and had then moved into education and librarianship. With experience in public, academic and special libraries, he was well placed not only to understand the demands of each of these sectors, but to explore the possibilities for co-operation between them (Saunders, n.d.). As the inaugural Director, he had a unique opportunity to shape the direction of the new department, aiming “to break the mould of traditional education for librarianship in general” (Saunders, 1989: 193). He consulted a variety of librarians from different sectors, and sought advice from representatives from the Library Association and Aslib. Staff at the UCL School of Librarianship and Archives, as it was then known, offered help and practical advice (Saunders, n.d.). Further to this consultation process, Saunders made a tour of twelve graduate library schools in the US, a country noted for its long tradition of graduate education in the field of librarianship. This trip would prove formative to the early years of the new Sheffield School. One feature that was noted was the willingness of the US schools to collaborate with other departments in teaching, in order to maximise their academic

![Figure 1](image-url)
offerings. The use of computers for library and information work, observed in American university libraries, would also come to shape the focus of the course at Sheffield; this will be discussed further (Saunders, 1964; n.d.).

Graduate schools were not common in the University, or indeed in UK universities in general, and there was a clear sense of identity and “a special atmosphere” in the School at its inauguration (SM, 2012). Wilf Saunders noted at the time of the School’s formation that, at the highest level within the University, “never was the slightest doubt expressed about the ‘academic respectability’ of librarianship, or whether it was a proper subject of study for a university” (Saunders, 1964: 105). According to Saunders, the University felt that the proposed School, with its stated aim of recruiting a highly able and accomplished cohort of graduates, would be a fine addition. However, the feeling within the department was perhaps slightly more self-conscious; as Frances Wood states, “there was a need at first to demonstrate clearly that librarianship and information studies were suitable areas to study at a university” (FW, 2012). Despite, or perhaps because of, the newness of the department, staff and students took their work seriously and high standards were expected of all.

**Staff recruitment**

With the new School’s funding secured, Wilf Saunders could begin the process of recruiting staff members. Joan Friedman was “rigorously intellectual” and came with a very strong reputation in the field of cataloguing and classification (NR, 2012). She had worked at Bletchley Park, and prior to her arrival at Sheffield had been serving as a librarian at the University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology. Sam Stych, who had been a senior staff member at Birmingham Reference Library, was highly regarded in the field of bibliography and reference work; Saunders described him as “one of nature’s Reference Librarians” (Saunders, n.d.). In addition to the skills of these two staff members, the scientific focus of the new School required a slightly different kind of appointment, and it was with this in mind that Herbert Schur was recruited. Most scientific libraries and information services at the time were headed by science graduates, but these workers generally had backgrounds in scientific or technical practice, and were not in possession of a professional librarianship qualification. The potential appointment of a lecturer without such a qualification was the
subject of much debate, but was eventually agreed upon. Schur had experience as an engineer and abstractor as well as in librarianship posts, and, in common with the other two new recruits, offered “considerable linguistic competence” (Saunders, n.d.). Skills in German and Russian were, at that time, particularly important in scientific and technological work.

Between the initial staff members there was around a century of practical experience in library and information work, but little teaching experience. Saunders had served as a part-time lecturer at the Birmingham School of Librarianship, and had experience in the professional education sector, but creating and operating an entire School would be something more of a challenge. Friedman recalled that although all were experienced in practical demonstrations and engaging with users, the shift from this to theoretical teaching was not always easy (Friedman, n.d.). Visits to libraries and the expertise of guest speakers were particularly valued in these early days. An annual visit to Sheffield City Libraries was undertaken, and supplemented by trips to university libraries at Leeds, Nottingham and Hull, plus the National Lending Library at Boston Spa and the West Riding County Library headquarters at Wakefield.

The School’s support staff played a part in creating the character of the school and contributing to its success. Wilf Saunders’ secretary, Mrs. Joan Fox, was loyal and capable, alongside the administration office, staffed by Hazel Brown and Audrey Corfield, all “calm and collected at difficult times” (NR, 2012). The office itself was situated in a Victorian front room, with a fireplace between the staff desks.

**The first intake of students**

Given the graduate status of the School’s students, they were expected to have in-depth knowledge of one subject, and the School aimed to help them “enlarge and enrich” that knowledge by placing it in the context of the discipline of librarianship (Saunders, 1964: 107). The course aimed to produce capable librarians with the essential skills and flexibility to work across the sector, enhancing their academic qualifications with a practical focus that would make them valuable assets to any type of library (Saunders, 1964). This practical slant was particularly important, as at the time many senior practitioners in the field of librarianship felt that existing library schools placed too much importance on
theoretical teaching, and produced students with little grasp of the hands-on realities of librarianship (NR, 2012; Friedman, n.d.).

The initial admissions requirements were modelled upon those at the UCL School (Saunders, n.d.): students were expected to have a good first degree, at either First or Upper Second level, a reading knowledge of two modern languages, and a minimum of one year’s LIS work experience. According to Saunders, such requirements would ensure that candidates possessed “considerable academic and personal maturity and a knowledge of the ‘grammar’ of librarianship” (Saunders, 1964: 107). The courses were heavily oversubscribed; one staff member estimated that at one point the department received an average of ten applications for every place (RM, 2012). Interviews were initially conducted by a panel of three or four staff members, but for some courses the decision was later taken for individual staff members to interview candidates. Some felt that this produced “a rather wider mix of experience [and] backgrounds” than the more uniform, conventional body of students that was sometimes yielded by committee selection (NR, 2012). Needless to say, the students who were chosen were of the highest academic calibre; one staff member judged that they contributed as much as the staff did to the academic life and overall development of the School (RM, 2012). Another felt that the School’s students were objectively the best cohort in the University at the time, given the high standards required for entrance (PW, 2012).

**Curriculum**

The first students joined the new School in September 1964, working towards a Diploma in Librarianship. With only 23 students in the first intake, the ratio of staff to students was highly favourable and enabled considerable contact time, with much teaching taking the form of seminars and small group work. In addition, a great deal of informal contact between staff and students was possible and contributed to the close-knit nature of the department.

Cataloguing, classification, bibliography, and library administration were the early focus of the Librarianship programme under Joan Friedman and Sam Stych. The course also included a survey of the history and current state of librarianship. Subject bibliography was seen as crucial to the foundations of librarianship, but Saunders felt its study had been
neglected in the context of academic libraries. He believed that university libraries would evolve to pass the duty of stock selection from teaching staff to librarians with specialised subject knowledge (Saunders, 1964). With this in mind, the Librarianship course included a specialised module of the student’s choice on the literature and bibliography of either science and technology, the humanities or the social sciences.

Public librarianship was “a very minor interest” in the early days, with only an hour and a half of teaching per week in this area (NR, 2012). Jock Murison, then County Librarian of Yorkshire, undertook this responsibility on a part-time basis. Roy Millington was brought in from the then Sheffield College of Art to teach courses on book production and printing, also part-time. One unusual, and popular, feature of the programme, from the 1971-72 academic year, was the opportunity to take a course in the Department of Japanese Studies. Alongside a crash course in Japanese language, students could undertake a study in an area of Japanese librarianship or information work (Friedman, n.d.).

Field weeks and visits to libraries and information services were undertaken from the beginning, notably an annual trip to London. During this week students visited the Library at the House of Commons, the University of London library, the British Library, as well as specialist institutions such as the Wellcome Medical Library and the library at the Central Electricity Generating Board. The week could be arduous (Joan Friedman noted that “students tended to tire more easily than staff”), but offered opportunities to socialise and enjoy the sights of the capital (Friedman, n.d.).

**Scientific and industrial librarianship and information work**

The scientific focus of the department at Sheffield distinguished it from other institutions; UCL had been relatively slow to embrace technological developments and had tended to focus on the humanities side of librarianship (ML, 2012; Saunders, n.d.). From its inauguration, the Librarianship course at Sheffield had featured computer applications, rudimentary data processing, information retrieval and indexing. Wilf Saunders’ trip to the US had crystallised his desire to include such subjects. In addition to receiving specialist advice from institutions such as Drexel, Western Reserve, and Illinois, who also offered courses with a scientific focus, he had observed the increased role that mechanisation was playing in large academic libraries, both as a tool for internal data processing and as a
subject for study. Given the forecasted large scale expansion of UK universities in the years to come, Saunders felt it vital to prepare students for the changing library and information landscape in which they would be working (Saunders, 1964).

The initial 23-strong intake of students, in 1964, included six science graduates. Under the designation Scientific and Industrial Librarianship and Information Work, students were able to follow a specially tailored course, featuring material on scientific and technical documentation, abstracting and indexing, manual and machine literature searching, and other problems specific to scientific and technical information work. By the late 1960s, when the Diploma had been upgraded to become a Master’s course, around 40% of students joining these courses were science graduates, some of whom already had PhDs; many expressed a particular wish to be scientific information specialists (JA, 2012). The MSc programme only admitted students with first degrees in scientific, engineering or medical subjects (Quarmby et al., 1999); it was smaller than the MA course, but was forward-looking and incorporated technological developments from very early on, notably computers and organisational information systems. The School’s focus on bibliography and information resources for science and technology at this stage would become the foundation of its specialisation in information science (Saunders, 1989).

Mike Lynch was brought in by Wilf Saunders in 1965 to head research and teaching in scientific and computer-based areas, as a Senior Research Fellow. Attracted to the School by its proposed focus on scientific information work, and by the emphasis placed upon research (ML, 2012), he would go on to become the first Professor of Information Science in the UK, gaining a Personal Chair in 1974. However, in the 1960s there was little possibility of students undertaking a great deal of practical work in computer-based applications during the academic year, owing to the cumbersome nature and expense of equipment at the time. Dissertations and PhD work provided more opportunity for such practical engagement (ML, 2012). The PLAN assembly language was used for early projects on the University’s ICL1900 computer, and hardware comprised paper tape and punch cards. A single change to a program could necessitate a trip to the university’s computer in the Hicks Building, and an overnight wait to assess whether or not the change had been successful (SM, 2012). For some projects using the SLIP list processing language, the University’s computer was not sufficiently powerful, so researchers had to travel to the Atlas Computer Laboratory at Harwell, Oxfordshire. As one researcher recalled, “it was not uncommon to book a night shift and sleep in the car on site at Harwell before driving back to Sheffield the
next day” (JA, 2012). COBOL was later introduced, and proved useful for applications in information systems and librarianship; in the 1980s and 1990s FORTRAN and Pascal were used. Library automation came to feature on all three Master’s courses and was taught by George Adamson during the 1970s; most of the early system development was undertaken in house and different approaches were analysed.

Atmosphere and social life of the new School

Several staff members recalled an atmosphere, in the early years, that was civilised and almost “gentlemanly” (SM, 2012). Teaching did not begin until 9:30 and Wednesday afternoons were free of classes. The School advocated a daily coffee break for staff and students, which continued to decreasing degrees until the 1990s. Student numbers were sufficiently small that staff and students quickly became acquainted, adding to an atmosphere of friendliness; many ex-staff and students recall the School as being “like a family” (SM, 2012). Students were addressed by their surnames and titles until the completion of their examinations, a practice which continued through the 1960s and into the 1970s. Initially, academic staff wore gowns to distinguish them from students, but as all the students were also graduates, the appropriateness of this was questioned and it was discontinued soon after the start of the 1968/69 academic year. The School was not untouched by the period of student unrest in the late 1960s, with some staff noting a change in students’ dress and demeanour during this time (RM, 2012; NR, 2012).

Upon completion of their examinations, students were taken on a ‘mystery bus tour’ to a pub in the Sheffield or Derbyshire countryside, “where they were regaled with one free pint/drink and addressed by their first names” (NR, 2012). Students organised many social events throughout the year, notably via the ‘Claremont Club’, which arranged international evenings and occasional revues (RU, 2012). Christmas parties were held annually in the department, and parties and dinners for students were also held at staff members’ homes, fostering the family spirit (RM, 2012; NR, 2012; RU, 2012). Joan Saunders, wife of Wilf, hosted an annual tea party, at which students were invited to sign their names on a tablecloth, upon which she would later embroider the signatures (PW, 2012; Figure 2).
Progression in the 1960s and 1970s

In 1967 the School became the Postgraduate School of Librarianship and Information Science. At the University’s request, in the 1968/69 academic year the Diploma course was upgraded to a taught Master’s degree: either an MA in Librarianship or an MSc in Information Studies, with the addition of a dissertation to be undertaken during the summer months at the end of the academic year. This made the Sheffield School the only institution in the country to offer a Master’s degree as a basic professional qualification in librarianship, and one of only two to offer a Master’s in information science. Students who had obtained Diplomas in previous years could now convert their qualification to a Master’s degree by undertaking an additional dissertation. In response to these growing demands on teaching, Norman Roberts joined the department from the College of Librarianship Wales and brought valuable library school teaching experience; Frances Wood joined from the National Lending Library and taught courses on the Information Science side. The premises at Claremont Crescent were expanded to encompass the two adjoining houses and to accommodate the growing staff and student body. However, the University was still “compact enough to establish useful working [and] social contacts with other departments” (NR, 2012), with a much smaller student population than today and a more “collegial” atmosphere (TW, 2012). Teaching hours were often considerable in comparison to other departments or universities; one staff member recalls undertaking twelve hours of lectures and formal contact per week, in addition to dissertation supervision in summer and preparation for the upcoming year in September (SM, 2012).

Figure 2. Tablecloth embroidered by Joan Saunders, featuring names of students. (a) Overview. (b) Close-up of names from the 1964-65 academic year. (c) Close-up of names, likely from an international course run by the School in 1972.
By 1973 the School had educated 322 postgraduates, of which 115 (36%) had followed the specialised scientific information programmes (Saunders, 1989). With the success of this specialisation in mind, a new degree course was introduced; the MA in Information Studies (Social Sciences) was devised by Tom Wilson and Norman Roberts. The development of the course, and its first three years of operation, were financed by the Nuffield Foundation, who had become concerned by a lack of capable social science and law graduates in the library and information science professions (Saunders, 1989; Roberts & Bull, 1983). Sheffield’s programme focusing on scientific information work had been noted as a successful attempt to remedy a comparable situation regarding scientific graduates, and it was suggested that the School might develop an effective course to assist in a similar manner in the social science field (Saunders, 1989). The department’s ability to evolve swiftly was demonstrated: the programme was suggested in late spring, advertised in late summer, and its first students arrived in October of the same year, a rapid turn of events almost unthinkable in the present-day University climate (NR, 2012). In 1971-72 the department had 38 students, but with the introduction of the new course, student numbers began to increase, and the annual intake rose to around 60 (Saunders, 1989). This happened despite opposition from some within the department; the School had been under threat because of its small size, and higher student numbers would place it on a more secure footing (NR, 2012; TW, 2012).

As time progressed, the content of the Librarianship course focused less on traditional subject areas such as bibliography and classification, and came to include courses on management and other social issues affecting the profession at the time (NR, 2012; RU, 2012), a development which was seen as useful by students when evaluated in the context of their first professional positions (Loughridge & Sutton, 1988). In 1976 Bob Usherwood was appointed to specialise in the hitherto rather neglected area of public librarianship, and in 1980 Brendan Loughridge would replace Sam Stych, also on the librarianship side. Joan Friedman felt that students on the MA Librarianship course were initially rather more traditional in their career ambitions than those on the other courses, but eventually came to be “more flexible in their attitudes to less conventional posts” (Friedman, n.d.). Reflecting the progression of technology in the information science field, the course also evolved to incorporate more technical aspects such as material on databases.
The 1980s – budgetary cuts and the rise of information management

The ‘golden age’ of Higher Education in the UK entered its closing stages around the end of the 1970s, and Sheffield, like other institutions, felt the impact of governmental budgetary cuts in the early 1980s (SM, 2012; NR, 2012; PW, 2012). Given its status as a postgraduate school, the department stood out as appearing overstuffed, with approximately one staff member to every five students; accepted wisdom at the time deemed postgraduates to require more staff contact than undergraduates. Wilf Saunders was comparatively successful in delaying the full impact of the cuts on the staff, striving not to create immediate redundancies but rather to eschew the appointment of replacements when existing staff members left. Funded studentships declined, leaving a different landscape from the early days when most students had been supported by such grants (PW, 2012).

In 1980 there was a large-scale reappraisal of degree programmes, resulting in “some quite fundamental changes, in both structure and content, of all the taught masters programmes” (Saunders, 1989: 195) and the abolition of examinations. In 1981 the School changed its name to the Department of Information Studies, reflecting its full range of research and teaching activities.

Following a two-year term as President of the Library Association, in 1982 Wilf Saunders retired from his post as Head of School. The position was taken over by Professor Tom Wilson; initially intended to be a temporary appointment, Wilson would stay in the role for another fifteen years. Described as “organised, focussed, and able” (NR, 2012), Wilson drove the information management agenda in the Department through the 1980s and 1990s. Staff at this time numbered eight full-time and one part-time, with no possibility of new appointments. During the 1980s there were suggestions that the Department should be incorporated into either the Department of Computer Science or the Management School, both of which were successfully resisted. However, it became evident that the only way in which the Department could survive would be to grow and broaden further, despite the scarcity of resources. Wilson’s strategy was to form “strategic alliances”, developing new courses in collaboration with other departments such as the
Management School, Medical School and Computer Science Department, thereby enabling the recruitment of new staff (TW, 2012).

Wilson and Norman Roberts founded the journal Social Science Information Studies in 1980, which later became the International Journal of Information Management. Its aim was to propagate “the joint exploration of common interests by social scientists and information scientists” (Wilson & Roberts, 1980: 3). This reflected the changing nature of the information science field, which was beginning to make itself felt in social sciences research as a whole. Wilson attributed this to the growth of technology in organisations in the early 1980s, which highlighted the dependency on information and its efficient management (Hodges, 1995). This technological focus was becoming apparent in all areas of the public and private sectors, and there was an increased demand for information professionals who were not only technologically proficient, but aware of the swiftly-evolving needs of students, teaching staff, and practitioners and how these could be met through new technology and information resources. These developments offered an opportunity to attract different kinds of students: not simply those focused on librarianship or scientific information work, but those oriented towards information management in a more general sense (TW, 2012; Figure 3).

Figure 3. Members of staff and students in the Department’s gardens, 1981-82. Photo courtesy of Bob Usherwood.
In the 1980s members of the Department began to use pioneering online services, such as ARPANET, Medline and Lockheed databases (FW, 2012). Students on the MSc courses worked with Dialog and other computer-based services, but were also taught to use print copies of publications such as BIOSIS and Index Medicus (PB, 2012). Computer facilities were still limited, with two small computer rooms, which had previously been staff offices, available for staff and student use. In contrast, today the School’s facilities include the Professor Tom Wilson Teaching Laboratory, and the Michael Lynch Research Laboratory, home to the Information Systems Research Group and with the capacity to accommodate 20 researchers. A new ‘iLab’ research facility is under construction.

By the late 1980s, Sheffield was still one of only two institutions in the country offering a Master’s degree in the LIS field; student admissions rose again, to 96. By this time, Wilf Saunders felt confident in claiming “a high degree of success in the realization of two of the most important of the department’s original aims”: the ability to attract top quality students, and the desire that these should include a high proportion of scientific graduates (1989: 196). However, Saunders also noted that efforts to recruit technology and law graduates had met with “limited success” (1989: 196).

The 1990s – new undergraduates; new premises

The University’s appointment of Gareth Roberts as Vice-Chancellor in 1991 had a huge impact upon the development of the University, and also upon the advancement of the Department of Information Studies (PW, 2012; Mathers, 2005). The Department came under increasing pressure to develop an undergraduate course, once again aiming to increase student numbers and thereby help to secure its future. Since the late 1980s, the Department had enjoyed a close academic relationship with the University’s Department of Management and Economic Studies, as it then was; that department’s MBA programme allowed students the option to take a course in information management. In 1993, the two departments began to offer Dual Honours undergraduate courses in Accounting and Financial Management/ Information Management, and Business Studies/ Information Management, with an initial intake of 15 students. In addition to increased academic demands, the introduction of undergraduates to the Department of Information Studies
subtly altered its culture, and was met initially with a mixed reception (MB, 2012; LS, 2012; PW, 2012). Peter Willett felt that with the introduction of undergraduates, the Department was brought into line with other departments and faculties, and made to realise “the world in which the rest of the University lived” (Willett, 2012). While the undergraduate programmes are still relatively young, the Information School now comprises as many undergraduates as postgraduates. However, in view of the prestigious reputation of the School’s postgraduate and research programmes, the undergraduate offering could be perceived as having enjoyed less success (SM, 2012). This could be a natural consequence of its relatively new status, but there may also be a lack of understanding among potential undergraduates regarding the subject area (PW, 2012). One former staff member expressed doubt regarding the suitability of Information Science as a subject for undergraduate study (SM, 2012), which appears to echo one piece of reasoning from the School’s founding: that “academic and personal maturity” (Saunders, 1964: 107), and a sound knowledge of one discipline, are important foundations upon which to build in this particular field.

In September 1992 the Department moved to its present location in Regent Court. By this time, it had grown to include not only three and a half houses on Claremont Crescent, but an additional two on Palmerston Road. The Department also possessed the gardens between the two sites, which provided a pleasant communal area, particularly in the spring and summer months. In contrast, the accommodation at Regent Court would be in a modern, purpose-built university building, shared with other departments. The initial aim had been to move the Department to the Hicks Building, but space had been insufficient; the newly-constructed building in the St. George’s area would accommodate the Departments of Information Studies and Computer Science. The move to new premises was cited by some as marking a shift in the ambience of the Department; it was now more closely enveloped in the University as a whole, and some felt that the idiosyncratic character and familial atmosphere engendered at Claremont Crescent faded somewhat with the move (SM, 2012). The daily coffee break had to end, as the University decreed that the new accommodation would not include any communal social space (PW, 2012). However, others felt that given the split nature of the site and the haphazard way in which it had expanded, it had become less communal and staff members could suffer from a feeling of isolation and lack of communication with other parts of the Department; it could be possible to go for weeks without seeing certain staff members (PB, 2012). The move to Regent Court brought all academic and administrative staff together, combined with
purpose-built student teaching areas and laboratories; some staff members felt that this created more of a sense of community (PB, 2012). Whether or not the move was a favourable one, it certainly altered the atmosphere of the Department and reflected the continual modernisation that has been one of its hallmarks.

The 1990s saw a continued emphasis, although less rigorous than before, on recruiting graduates with backgrounds in social science, science and engineering (Hodges, 1995). In 1992, the Department’s postgraduate offering was re-evaluated. It was felt that the MSc in Information Science and the MSc in Information Studies (Social Sciences) were no longer sufficiently distinct to justify two separate courses, and as a result they were merged and replaced by the MSc Information Management. As the 1990s progressed, teaching and learning began to reflect the growth of technology that was becoming apparent in the wider world, with an increase in online learning, web-based resources, and the use of video lectures. Students learned to hand-code HTML and work with hypertext; most did not have PCs at home (SM, 2012). David Miller made “a tremendous contribution” to establishing and developing the IT infrastructure of the Department and training technicians (MB, 2012). In 1994-95, the Department ran an MSc course on Electronic Information Management for students from around Europe, including a placement with a European organisation; in 1995 new MSc courses in Health Information Management and Textual Computing were created, the latter in collaboration with the Department of Computer Science (Hodges, 1995). This collaboration continued with the MSc in Information Systems, offered from 1997. By the mid-90s, the department had 28 full-time PhD students and 12 academic staff; high-profile research projects included work on information retrieval systems for protein structures in biotechnology (Artymiuk et al., 2005) and computer-assisted teaching and learning (Fowell & Levy, 1995). This latter project, a reflection of Sheffield’s early recognition that “education will be transformed by technology” (Hodges, 1995), received substantial funding under the Follett Implementation Group on Information Technology (FIGIT) programme, which aimed to apply the recommendations of the 1993 Follett report on libraries and information technology in UK higher education (HEFCE, 1993).

In 1997 Tom Wilson retired as Head of Department, and the leadership was taken over by Peter Willett for a year, until the appointment in 1998 of Micheline Beaulieu, previously Head of Department at City University. She regarded the appointment as “an honour”, being influenced by the philosophy and approach of Wilf Saunders, and felt she
had “a responsibility to carry [on] the mission” (MB, 2012). Her tenure was marked by significant growth in the Department, both in terms of its size and the scope of its activities, and by a shift towards a more businesslike managerial style, with a focus on strategic development, reflecting growing trends of the time (SM, 2012). At the time of her appointment, she felt that the Department’s achievements were overlooked within the University, and set out “to make sure that the University knew what they had” (MB, 2012). A team teaching approach was introduced, which was beneficial to the Department in several ways: responsibilities were shared, teaching became more collaborative, and staff relationships were reinforced (MB, 2012). Beaulieu also led the Information Retrieval Research Group. She later went on to serve as the founding Chair of the Interdisciplinary Centre of the Social Sciences (ICOSS), and become the University’s first female Pro-Vice Chancellor.

The BSc degree in Information Management was introduced in 1999, the first single honours course to be offered by the Department. Undergraduate students had previously shared modules with postgraduates, but the new course represented a move towards detaching these two groups and offering undergraduates tailor-made provision.

The year 2000 and beyond

In the year 2000 the Department introduced an MSc course in Chemoinformatics. Funded by a substantial grant from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and input from a consortium of chemical and software companies, it was the first such course anywhere in the world. It continued until 2010, when it transitioned from being a taught course to an MSc by research. An MSc course was also introduced in Health Informatics, with an initial intake of twelve students. Taught jointly with the School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), the programme still exists and is a full time distance learning course, aimed at those working in information-related posts in the health care sector. In 2004 a new MA in Multilingual Information Management was offered, in partnership with the Modern Language Teaching Centre. The Department’s collaboration with the Management School continued with the introduction in 2007 of the MSc in Information Systems Management. Innovative new Masters courses were also launched in Electronic and Digital Library Management, and Information Literacy.
Micheline Beaulieu stepped down as Head of School in 2002 and was replaced by Peter Willett, who would continue until 2006, when Sheila Corrall was appointed. In 2009 the department was invited to become the first UK member of the iSchools consortium, a group of highly rated educational institutions “dedicated to advancing the information field in the 21st Century” (iSchools Organization, 2012). Following this, the decision was taken to change the department’s name once again, this time to become the Information School, or iSchool. This move was welcomed, as it was perceived to increase the identification of the Sheffield School with the global iSchools movement (PM, 2012), reflecting both the School’s sense of innovation and its strong international links and reputation. In the same year the School diversified the BSc course in Information Management, with options to specialise in technology or business studies (AP, 2012). Sheila Corrall’s four-year tenure as Head of School ended in August 2010, with duties taken over by Philippa Levy.
Characteristics of the School

Research

Development of a research climate

From the School’s inception, the spirit of research has been fostered in the department. In 1964, as Wilf Saunders put it, “research in librarianship and information science, save in certain bibliographical areas, was virtually non-existent” (Saunders, 1989: 197). Saunders felt that active involvement in research would be highly beneficial to the School, leading inevitably to more dynamic and innovative teaching. Furthermore, it would ensure that the School became well regarded in the University and in the academic community as a whole; a thriving research community would bolster the School’s reputation as a true and rounded academic department, rather than simply a professionally-focused one (PW, 2012; WS, 1964). His guidance and ambition ensured that the School became highly regarded within the University for its research credentials, and externally he established a strong working relationship with funding agencies within the British Library (NR, 2012). In this regard, the Sheffield School was in an unusual position in the field for its time; “the success in attracting research money... was wholly distinctive during the late 60s and 70s” (NR, 2012). Saunders was well aware of the crucial importance of research in solving the problems associated with rapidly increasing volumes of information. He prefigured the department’s success in 1964 when he wrote of his “hope that some really useful research will be generated from our specialization in scientific and industrial librarianship and information work” (Saunders, 1964: 113). The creation of OSTI (the Office of Scientific and Technical Information), around the same time, was fortuitous for the School in this regard, as it was the beneficiary of OSTI’s first research grant. This grant enabled the appointment of Mike Lynch as Senior Research Fellow, and the funding of an influential project on subject indexes and the automatic retrieval of information. By the 1966-67 academic year, a team of five full-time research workers had been established, addressing various aspects of computer applications (Saunders, 1989).

In the 1980s the Department featured three “powerful and very productive” research groups (Saunders, 1989: 198). The Chemical Patents Retrieval Group and the Computational Information Retrieval Group developed from the department’s original
research teams; work on chemical patents has been of great value to the worldwide pharmaceutical industry (Hodges, 1995). Mike Lynch and Peter Willett have been key figures in developing research in this area, which has been “absolutely central” to the School’s success in the research arena (TW, 2012). The Consultancy and Research Unit arose from the creation of the Centre for Research in User Studies (CRUS) in 1975, and was renamed the Consultancy and Research Unit of the University of Sheffield in 1984 (Figure 4). CRUS “achieved high visibility in the information world” due to its research and consultancy activities in the fields of humanities, education and business information (Lynch, 1990: 58). The focus on user studies has long been a strength of the department (Beaulieu, 2003), and continues in the School to this day. The Centre for Health Information Management Research (CHIMR) was founded in the 1994-95 academic year, in conjunction with ScHARR and the School of Nursing and Midwifery. At one time in the late 1980s and early 1990s, 60% of all grants allotted by the British Library R&D Department found their way to the department at Sheffield (TW, 2012), a testament to its strong research climate and ability to attract funding.

Figure 4. 8 Palmerston Road, location for the Centre for Research in User Studies, later Consultancy and Research Unit.
In 2001 the research framework of the Department was restructured, resulting in the establishment of two new groups: the Computational Informatics Research Group (CIRG), headed by Peter Willett, and the Library and Information Management Research Group (LIMRG), led by Bob Usherwood. The Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society (CEPLIS, later CPLIS) was established to provide a focus for public library research in the Department, and to undertake paid consultancy work for a variety of national and international organisations. Staff associated with CEPLIS have been involved in a number of high-profile studies in the area, including the Department of National Heritage’s Public Library Review and the Library Association’s Model Standards for Public Libraries.

Research Assessment Exercise

The government’s Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) has been described as “the best thing that ever happened to the department” (PW, 2012). Tom Wilson, writing in 1997, remarked that at that time many institutions were still evolving their research strategies; universities with a strong and established research culture would likely benefit most from the RAE (Wilson, 1997), and Sheffield was a prime example of this. As the only department in the University to achieve the highest possible 5 or 5* rating in every RAE, the reputation of the School was greatly improved and other departments and faculties began to take notice. The School’s opportunities to collaborate with other departments in the University have arisen, at least partly, due to this increased prominence. Gareth Roberts believed strongly in the importance of the RAE and firmly appreciated the amount of industrial money the School brought in via its research projects (PW, 2012). In 1985-86, the Transbinary Group on Librarianship and Information Studies (TYGLIS) noted that research in the LIS sector as a whole was “questionable” in quality, and “of marginal interest” (Willett, in press); however, Sheffield was judged to have a “consistently high standard of research” (Saunders, 1989: 199), and was the only department judged to be ‘Well above average’ (Willett, in press). The TYGLIS report also noted that the Department of Information Studies was “one of the top two or three departments in the whole of Sheffield University for attracting research funds” (Saunders, 1989: 199). In the 1989, 1992, 1996 and 2000 RAEs, the School was well ahead of other LIS departments in the UK; by the time of the 2008 Exercise, competition had increased and the gap had narrowed, but Sheffield was still ranked highest. The new incarnation of the RAE, the Research Excellence Framework (REF)
is scheduled to publish its results in December 2014, and with further changes having been made to the method of assessment, it will be of interest to see how the iSchool fares (Willett, in press).

**Diversity and collaboration**

At the time of the School's establishment, the discipline of Information Science was still relatively young. Since the early days of the department, there has been a great deal of scope for staff members to explore their interests and discover new areas for research (SM, 2012). The diversity of research interests has been cited by several staff members, past and present, as a key strength and defining characteristic of the School. Staff have always come from a variety of backgrounds, from librarians to chemists and computer scientists (PB, 2012; LS, 2012; PW, 2012). This has furthered the creative spirit of the School and ensured innovative collaboration in the areas of research and teaching; for example, a study by Whittle et al. (2007) on data mining of search engine logs brought together several members of staff with diverse research interests and areas of expertise. Innovative collaboration with other departments, and with external organisations, has also been evident (Lynch, 1990). In the 1990s the Department worked with Professor Mark Greengrass, of the Humanities Research Institute, to create a complete electronic edition of Samuel Hartlib's papers (Humanities Research Institute, 2012); stemming algorithms and other information retrieval techniques were used to search databases of historical texts, and the research resulted in the development of a stemming algorithm for Latin text databases (Schinke et al., 1996). Staff enjoy the freedom to publish in a variety of journals, not solely those focusing on LIS subjects. Owing to this strong and supportive climate of research, research-led teaching has been a hallmark of the School; modules have frequently been developed from staff members' own research interests and results (SM, 2012). In addition, research-led learning and teaching in the School involves practical research projects and exercises being undertaken by students, inquiry-based learning, and a holistic integration of research at all levels of teaching (Goulding & Usherwood, 2003). The Educational Informatics Research Group has undertaken significant research in this area (Levy et al., 2003). In 2005 the University established the Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences (CILASS), and the Department became one of the leading participants.
Student research

Writing in 2003, Goulding and Usherwood state that “[r]esearch-led teaching leads to students who have the skills of analysis and synthesis required of practitioners in the modern information world” (139). While staff and research students in the School have always been strongly encouraged to undertake and publish research, there has also been an emphasis on taught students doing the same. Enquiry-based learning and research was, and still is, expected in many taught modules, and students are given substantial tuition in research skills. This aims to ensure that students are adaptable and capable of independent thought and work (Wilson, 2012). Wilf Saunders’ initial intention was for students to complete “a long-term project in some area of librarianship” to demonstrate their ability to work independently (Saunders, 1964: 107). The original course therefore required the completion of a ‘Special Study’ during the few weeks between the end of examinations and the end of the academic year in spring. Once the Diploma course was upgraded to a Master’s degree in the 1968-69 academic year, students were expected to undertake a full dissertation. From its introduction, the dissertation module has provided an excellent opportunity to formulate and carry out a small-scale novel research project, affording students an introduction to “the problems and rewards of research” (Information School, 2011). Dissertation projects have covered an extensive range of topics within the LIS field: recent subjects for study have included ‘Impact of Internet censorship on the information behaviour of students from Iran, China and Saudi Arabia’ (Hafiz, 2010); ‘Food allergy related health information on the web’ (Maitra, 2010); ‘The role of the public library in promoting community resilience’ (Grace, 2011), and ‘The impact of the web interface on the consumer trust in e-commerce (B2C)’ (Li, 2011). Certain dissertations have been published and formed part of the School’s submission to the RAE; for example, ‘A comparison of the pharmacophore identification programs: Catalyst, DISCO and GASP’ (Patel et al., 2002), and ‘Use of the R-group descriptor for alignment-free QSAR’ (Hirons et al., 2005).
Current research groups

The School currently features seven research groups, with a strong culture of collaboration across these groups. The Chemoinformatics Research Group “involves the development of new algorithmic techniques for processing databases of chemical and biological structures” and works in partnership with pharmaceutical and agrochemical companies, and other academic departments across the University (Chemoinformatics Research Group, 2012). The research interests of the Health Informatics Research Group cover analysis of health information, consumer health information, and health informatics training and education (Health Informatics Research Group, 2012). The School’s strength in the area of Information Retrieval has long been noted, and the research group of this name focuses on cognitive and user-centric methods for the design and evaluation of IR systems, the development of new statistical IR techniques, multimedia browsing and retrieval, and personal information management and retrieval (Information Retrieval Research Group, 2012). The Information Systems Research Group “focuses on exploring the interface between management, information science and computer science” (Information Systems Research Group, 2012), and the Libraries and Information Society Research Group “covers Library and Information Services in all sectors and information-related issues and concerns in contemporary society”, with topics ranging from reader development to the application of business management theory in the LIS sector (Libraries and Information Society Research Group, 2012). Educational Informatics is another long-studied, and still-growing, area in the School, and this group aims to understand the overlap between ICT, information science, and learning and teaching (Educational Informatics Research Group, 2012). The Centre for Information Literacy Research (CILR) was launched in 2007, reflecting the School’s expertise in the area. In recent years, the topic of information literacy has become more prevalent in the School’s academic offerings, due in part to staff research interests. Postgraduate students take a module entitled Information Resources and Information Literacy, which covers theoretical and practical aspects of information literacy and information behaviour. Finally, the Knowledge and Information Management Research Group addresses strategic, behavioural, social practice, and systems approaches to knowledge management (Knowledge and Information Management Research Group, 2012). In addition, the School continues to lead CPLIS and CHIMR.
Writing in 1990, Mike Lynch summarises the Department’s strengths in this area: “our ability to identify relevant and timely research topics, to attract suitable staff or students, to progress the work to completion, and to report the results publicly” (Lynch, 1990). As Peter Willett writes more recently, “[h]aving a well-established research culture in a department is a necessary pre-requisite for it to continue producing high-quality research, and the situation is hence likely to continue in the future, given strong departmental leadership and appropriate institutional support” (Willett, in press).

A practical and professional focus

Another defining characteristic of the Sheffield School, since the early years, has been its links with the professions. Wilf Saunders felt, from the School’s inception, that library schools in the UK could benefit from stronger links to practice, as he had observed in the US (Saunders, n.d.). Many staff members, throughout the School’s history, have come from practice rather than a direct academic route, ensuring a mix of knowledge, skills and perspectives and a practical slant to teaching. Visiting speakers have also provided external viewpoints and insight; notable examples include Dr. Maurice Line, who was also a member of the department’s advisory board, and Dr. Donald Urquhart, who established the National Lending Library for Science and Technology. More recently, Martin Molloy, of Derbyshire County Council, and Martin White, of Intranet Focus Ltd., have served as Visiting Professors. Sheffield staff were often asked to serve on assessment and validation panels for polytechnic institutions, allowing them insight into developments elsewhere in the field (NR, 2012). Throughout the School’s history academic staff members have been active in a wide range of professional and academic organisations and editorial boards; space does not permit a full examination here. However, it is worth mentioning that several staff members have served as Presidents of various high-profile professional associations: Wilf Saunders and Bob Usherwood of the Library Association; Mike Lynch of the Institute of Information Sciences, and Peter Willett of the Chemical Structure Association.

In conjunction with these links, the School has engaged in considerable activity regarding continuing education for professionals in the LIS field. In 1966 a three-week course was run for senior librarians from across the globe, on behalf of the British Council, entitled “Librarianship in Britain”. That same year, and the following one, the department
ran an intensive four-day course for senior university library staff on computer applications in libraries, providing an introduction to the subject for “virtually every British university library” (Saunders, 1989: 199). Workshops and seminars have also been conducted for professionals in the chemoinformatics and information management fields. In 1975 the School was invited to present a successful month-long course on the subject of advanced information work, on behalf of UNISIST, FID and IFLA. The course covered information retrieval, library and information systems management, and computing and telecommunications applications in information systems, all with a hands-on, interactive slant (Saunders, 1989). The School’s Mature Entry programme was renamed the Professional Development Programme in 1993, offering students with significant work experience the opportunity to update their qualifications.

Real systems have frequently been used in teaching, and projects have made use of links with LIS service users, using real queries for searches (PM, 2012; FW, 2012). Dissertation topics have often resulted from contact with, and suggestions from, practitioners or users, and in many cases have been carried out in collaboration with external organisations (FW, 2012; Lynch, 1990), sometimes resulting in a job offer upon graduation (Wilson, 2012). The course on Business Information required students to prepare a report for an acquisition or takeover, reflecting an emphasis on practical skills rather than straightforward essay writing (FW, 2012). This module was eventually renamed Business Intelligence, reflecting a shift in the focus and material studied: previously it had addressed the provision of external information to businesses, but was modified to discuss the ways in which businesses can exploit internal information, including technological developments such as data warehousing (PM, 2012). Currently, the module on Business Intelligence offers students the opportunity to work with an external organisation or company to conduct a relevant project, a scheme which has garnered favourable reviews from both students and organisations (PM, 2012). Assessment in the department has often departed from the traditional essay style of assessment, and this continues today; students are expected to write briefing papers, make presentations, conduct mock interview processes, build websites, and create videos and ‘digital stories’. Such work aims to prepare students for the kinds of projects and assessments they will encounter in their future working lives, rather than simply teaching the skills required to write an academic essay.
Supportive teaching and learning

One of the department’s great strengths, as mentioned by many staff members from various periods in the School’s history, has been its positive, supportive atmosphere. Under the “wise guidance” of Wilf Saunders (ML, 2012), the School was known as a caring department, taking an almost familial attitude to supporting staff and students in addition to academic rigour (SM, 2012; NR, 2012). During Saunders’ time as Head, and that of Tom Wilson, staff in the department were shielded, to some degree, from the influence and politics of the University. The number of staff throughout the School’s history who began as students within the department is considerable, and many staff members have served for long periods of time, ensuring a continuity of spirit and serving as testimony to the academic strength and positive character of the department. However, the appointment of new staff from other institutions and from industry ensures that the department remains fresh and innovative as well as maintaining its tradition (PM, 2012; AP, 2012). Curricula are updated each year to ensure they remain up to date and reflect developing trends in the field; the School’s emphasis upon research-led teaching ensures that accepted wisdom is constantly being challenged. Staff take teaching responsibilities seriously and display a “genuine commitment to students”; in addition, staff members take advantage of learning and training opportunities throughout the University in order to sustain this high standard of teaching and further their own development (PM, 2012). The Teaching Quality Assessment of 2001, undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), involved a great deal of time and effort on the part of both academic and support staff (MB, 2012; HG, 2012; RU, 2012; PW, 2012). The School eventually scored 22 points out of a possible 24; it is testament to the self-imposed high standards of the department that some staff were dissatisfied with this rating (MB, 2012; HG, 2012).

The spirit of intellectual collaboration has also been evident throughout the School’s development. One staff member recalled that when he took up a teaching post at Sheffield, two senior staff members assisted him in starting some independent research; “an unusual act of generosity but normal in the School at that time” (SM, 2012). Such effort and support is all the more remarkable when one considers the variety of subjects taught and researched in the School, and the diversity of staff members’ backgrounds in various academic subjects and industries (PB, 2012). Such a wide range of interests can sometimes
pose difficulties for the department, particularly when attempting to replace academic staff; each staff member covers a distinct span of topics within the LIS sphere, and the specialised nature of some modules can render it problematic to find a suitable replacement (PW, 2012). However, as already noted, such diversity is also a boon in that it gives a wider view of the field, promoting the study of new areas and providing ample opportunity for innovative collaboration.

**International reputation**

The School has long enjoyed a high reputation, not only within the UK, but internationally. From the early days of the School, Sheffield staff were much in demand for advisory committees and academic programmes in the UK and abroad, often in conjunction with the British Council or Library Association (NR, 2012; Saunders, 1989). Wilf Saunders travelled extensively and built up the reputation of the School throughout the world; he served as a member of the British Council from 1970. Several members of staff undertook work for UNESCO, making trips in 1985-86 to Moi University in Kenya, and to Ethiopia. These visits were made not only to teach library and information skills to practitioners in these countries, but to develop the curricula as well (FW, 2012). Library and information professionals from the developing world also journeyed to Europe to undergo a ‘crash course’ from Sheffield staff. In the 1990-91 academic year, an MSc Information Management course was introduced that was taught via distance learning in collaboration with the Laboratório Nacional de Engenharia e Tecnologia Industrial (LNETI) in Portugal. Further MSc degrees were established several years later in collaboration with the Universidade Autonoma de Lisboa (UAL) and University of Oporto. At City College Thessaloniki in Greece, staff from Sheffield visited and helped to establish a franchise of the MSc course in Information Systems from 1998 onwards. Senior professionals from a variety of countries, and from positions in both industry and academia, have spent time as Visiting Fellows in the School.

In the early days of the department, international students had largely come from Commonwealth countries, and had been few in number. By the mid-1980s the Department’s international reputation had become very strong and the presence of overseas students had begun to be evident, particularly those undertaking PhDs. At that
time, UK students still formed the majority, whereas in the School today the greater part of research students, as with taught students, are from overseas (PW, 2012). In 2002 there were only two international students on the BSc Information Management course; in 2012 the numbers are roughly evenly split between home and international students. Staff make efforts to mix the two groups to ensure a more rounded and international learning experience for all students (AP, 2012).

Today the School maintains its high reputation around the world, a position supported by its membership of the iSchools organisation. Formal and informal links have been made with LIS departments in countries as diverse as Greece, Iran, Morocco, Peru, Portugal and Turkey (Saunders, 1989).

Student success

The Sheffield School has always had a significant reputation for “turning out useful people” (SM, 2012). In its first 25 years, the School boasted a near-100% rate of graduate employment, with around 40% of students securing first posts in academic libraries, 26% in special libraries and information units, 18% in public libraries, and the remainder in a combination of national libraries, PhD study, research and general information-related posts (Saunders, 1989). Students on the MA Information Studies (Social Sciences) were almost evenly split between jobs in librarianship and other information work (Roberts & Bull, 1983). Of MSc students in the early 1980s, almost half entered industry and commerce, and almost one third were working in “less traditional areas (predominantly information technology)”; in a 1987 survey, 93% of graduates worked with computer applications in their posts (Wood et al., 1987: 297). This represented a marked divergence from the general employment trends of LIS graduates from other institutions; the report of the Transbinary Group, in 1986, had revealed a need for increased numbers of scientific information graduates, and Sheffield students were seen to be fulfilling this need (Wood et al., 1987). Students on the MA Librarianship course in the 1980s generally found employment in academic and public libraries (Loughridge & Sutton, 1988). By 1996, the numbers of MA students entering first posts in these “traditional destinations” had declined, “from 77 per cent in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and 62 per cent in the late 1980s to just under 50 per cent in the early 1990s” (Loughridge et al., 1996: 107). Special libraries and the ‘emerging market’ of information management-related positions showed
large increases in comparison (Loughridge et al., 1996). The drop in the number of students taking up public library posts at this time supported Usherwood and Vessey’s (1988) view that education in the field of public librarianship was in decline; however, academic libraries were seen to be on the rise again after “a dip in the difficult late 1980s” (Loughridge et al., 1996: 108). A survey in the mid-1990s found that students graduating from the MSc Information Management course continued to work predominantly in industry and commerce (Quarmby et al., 1999). Owing to data protection legislation and reduced student response rates, in recent years it has been difficult to locate published information regarding students’ destinations (Loughridge, 2003). However, given developments in the LIS field as a whole, and the corresponding evolution of the School’s teaching programmes, it would seem a reasonable assumption that Sheffield graduates remain highly employable in an ever-widening variety of positions.

Sheffield students have reported a high level of satisfaction with their degree programmes, and have expressed the opinion that the subjects taught on the course were relevant to their present and future working life (Loughridge, 2003; Wood et al., 1987; Roberts, 1973). The Sheffield programmes are intentionally challenging and graduates are noted hard workers, in great demand in a variety of roles (Wilson, 2012). As early as 1983, material on information storage and retrieval, programming and other ICT-related topics was noted by students as proving useful in their professions (Roberts & Bull, 1983). Students in the fields of information management and informatics typically go on to work as information specialists in a range of organisations; many find positions such as systems analysts, business intelligence analysts, information architects, project managers, software specialists and web designers (PB, 2012; AP, 2012). Several Sheffield alumni have gone on to become Chief University Librarians and head public and academic library services in the UK and around the world. Also of interest is the number of graduates undertaking further research or study; this has been addressed in more detail elsewhere in this piece.

A note on the preceding section

It may be observed from the above section that the strengths of the School have been discussed in some detail, with little examination of the aspects that have been found less favourable. This is in part due to the overwhelmingly positive responses garnered from interviewees, very few of whom had anything critical to say about the School. Where
negative responses were received, they were usually qualified with a request not to be published. However, in the interest of balance it would seem appropriate to mention the few points that were cited, and approved to be mentioned, as potential weaknesses of the School. As one staff member noted, “[a]ll was not reason and light” (NR, 2012). The fact that many staff members had served for long periods of time could be seen as contributing to a sense of stagnation. One could argue that the regular recruitment of new staff members in recent years has served to mitigate this, and that the School’s high position in its field could not have been achieved without the innovation for which it is noted. The supportive, familial atmosphere of the department has been considered as a generally positive phenomenon, and it was remarked that the first two Heads of School were very effective in shielding staff from University politics (SM, 2012). However, one staff member felt that on occasion in the past the department’s cosiness had rendered it less able to acknowledge and confront difficult issues (SM, 2012).
Conclusion: The future for the Information School

The 2012/13 academic year sees the introduction of the BSc in Informatics, and two degrees taught in collaboration with the Management School: the BA in Accounting and Financial Management and Informatics, and the BA in Business Management and Informatics. These courses represent a radical redesign of the curriculum at undergraduate level, with a shift in emphasis from information management to informatics (PB, 2012). The new programme will focus on the interaction between users, technology, and information, with modules including Information Behaviour in Context, Digital Technologies in Organisations, and Human Computer Interaction. Elective modules enable students to diversify and specialise in areas such as Advanced Web Design, Digital Economy, and Geographical Informatics. A strong research spine runs through the course, with students being instructed in research methods from the first year, and a large scale research project being undertaken in the third year. The School intends to make more opportunities available for students to work with external organisations, and spend some time working in industry between their second and third years (PB, 2012).

Facilities in Regent Court are currently being upgraded, including the creation of a new Digital Media Suite for teaching and research, and a new ‘iLab’ research facility. In addition, a new shared common space and staff meeting room, new groupwork and interview rooms are being established, and improvements are being made to the Professor Tom Wilson Teaching Laboratory.

In 2012 the School has 22 academic staff, around 70 PhD students, and approximately 300 taught undergraduates and postgraduates. From the 2012-13 academic year Professor Val Gillet will take over as Head of School. In many ways it is a very different place from the Postgraduate School of Librarianship as founded in 1963. Governmental policy is once again affecting the progression of the School: heavy cuts are being made to ‘non-priority areas’ of university teaching, which includes the LIS field. In addition, the considerable rise in undergraduate fees will surely alter the constitution of the BSc and BA programmes. Managerial and financial pressures ensure that academic staff find a good deal of their time taken up with administrative duties, despite the able assistance of the School’s support staff (PW, 2012). However, one of the School’s strengths is its sense of tradition, in spite of being a young department in comparison to others within the University. There is strong appreciation for the pioneering work and efforts of previous
colleagues, and a sustained expectation that the School will continue to innovate and uphold high standards in the future (PW, 2012).

The current climate is such that many LIS departments are either closing or being subsumed by larger departments, such as those in the areas of Management or Computer Science (PW, 2012). There is a recognition within the department at Sheffield that to ensure continued success, the School will need to display the flexibility required to meet the changing research and teaching needs of the fast-paced world of information (PB, 2012; VG, 2012; PW, 2012). Sheffield’s iSchool is well placed to continue as a successful department in its own right, with documented excellence in both teaching and research supplemented by a positive, supportive atmosphere and sense of innovation. However, the effects of the current external climate are yet to be fully realised; given the immense change over the previous 50 years, it will be interesting to see in what incarnation the future of the School lies.
Reflections on the project

It is usual to conclude an academic thesis with suggestions for further research. Given the nature of this project as an anniversary study, such suggestions do not seem particularly possible or appropriate. However, it would seem a useful exercise to reflect upon the success or otherwise of the process, which we believe to be a novel one.

Overall, the use of the oral history methodology worked well, and provided a large quantity of information. For the most part this information was relevant to the task at hand, and offered viewpoints and anecdotal data that were not to be found in formal documentation. The quality of interviewees’ information was generally high, although sometimes information was gathered that was less relevant to the topic of the history of the School. This, however, usually provided interesting background material; for example, the career histories of individual staff members provided useful context even though it was less appropriate to include them in the report.

While most interviewees were expansive and happy to provide opinions alongside factual details, some were more diffident and willing only to provide the briefest of factual information. In some instances this was likely due to interviewees still being involved with the School’s activities, and therefore exhibiting caution in expressing their opinions. Those who had been involved with the School in earlier times perhaps exhibited a more rounded, reflective view of proceedings, with the benefit of hindsight and overview. It is to be expected that more recent recruits, and current staff, would offer a different kind of viewpoint.

Given the long timescale studied, individual recollections were sometimes shown to be flawed or incomplete. In an effort to mitigate this, questions were usually provided to interviewees in advance. However, the questions were often fairly broad in scope and some interviewees were unable to remember large amounts of useful detail. This could be overcome, in future work, by careful consideration of specific issues to be discussed, and by providing interviewees with more detailed lists of questions and potential topics.

On a practical level, the greatest difficulty encountered was in contacting and receiving responses from potential interviewees. While most of those targeted responded positively, some were unresponsive or unwilling to engage with the study. This is probably the greatest weakness of the report; efforts have been made to present events and
opinions in a balanced way, but inevitably such a report will be biased towards the information provided by those interviewees who were most responsive and engaged. Some areas of the report may lack depth, owing to the scarcity of interviewees able or willing to discuss particular eras or themes.

The research had initially been planned with a dedicated interview phase at the beginning of the research period. It quickly became apparent that, given the varying responsiveness and availability of interviewees, interviews would likely continue throughout the period. However, this did confer some advantages. Early interviews were useful to obtain an overview of the topics at hand, to give ideas for further research, and to improve the interview technique. Those interviews conducted towards the end of the project were effective in different ways: with more knowledge, and a sense of how the project was developing, it was possible to target questions more effectively and receive more specific information. However, for future work it would be recommended to conduct at an early time those interviews perceived as particularly lengthy, significant or likely to provide a helpful overview of the project.

*Word count: 14,994.*
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Appendices

List of abbreviations

Staff members who are cited directly in the research are listed below. Also interviewed were three staff members whose contributions remain anonymous and are cited as SM.

JA  Janet Ash
PB  Peter Bath
MB  Micheline Beaulieu
VG  Val Gillet
HG  Helen Grindley
ML  Mike Lynch
PM  Pam McKinney
RM  Roy Millington
AP  Alex Peng
NR  Norman Roberts
LS  Linda Simmons
RU  Bob Usherwood
PW  Peter Willett
TW  Tom Wilson
FW  Frances Wood
Participant information sheet

Research Project Title: A History of the Information School at the University of Sheffield

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project’s purpose?

To coincide with the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Information School at the University of Sheffield, the department has suggested a dissertation to research and report the history and development of the Information School. This has not previously been documented. The research aim is to document the history of the School, its evolution and growth, and the contribution that the School and its members have made to the field of library and information science.

Why have I been chosen?

As a key figure in the history of the School, you have been chosen to provide insight and information regarding the School and your recollections of it.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.
What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be interviewed at least once during the period April-August 2012, with potential for further interviews or telephone/email contact if required. The interview will comprise mostly open questions regarding your memories and other information you can provide on the history and development of the School. Topics for in-depth discussion will include: the founding and early days of the School; key figures in its history (academic staff, administrative staff, and students); the ethos of the School and how it changed and developed over time.

Your interview will be recorded, where possible, in audio format. Recordings will be used only for analysis by the researcher and will not be published or broadcast. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will provide a valuable account of the history and development of the Information School.

What if something goes wrong?

Complaints may be addressed to Professor Peter Willett, Information School, University of Sheffield, p.willett@sheffield.ac.uk. If you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction by this staff member, you can contact the University’s Registrar and Secretary.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Given the nature of the project, the information you provide, and your participation, will not be kept confidential, unless specifically requested.
What will happen to the results of the research project?

The research project will form the dissertation component of the MA Librarianship degree. It may also be published subsequently in modified form as a journal article or conference paper. You will be able to obtain a copy of the finished dissertation from the Information School.

Who is organising and funding the research?

Information School, University of Sheffield.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the Information School’s ethics review procedure. The University’s Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University’s Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

Contact for further information

Lead researcher: Melanie Benson, 07763 652461, mtbenson1@shef.ac.uk
Alternative contact: Peter Willett, 0114 222 2633, p.willett@shef.ac.uk

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form for your records.

Thank you for taking part in this project.
Sample participant consent form

**Participant Consent Form**

Title of Research Project: A History of the Information School at the University of Sheffield

Name of Researcher: Melanie Benson

Participant Identification Number for this project: Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 7 April 2012 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3. (please select a, b, or c)
   a) I give permission for my responses to be included in the report resulting from the research, and for those responses to be attributed to me by name.

   b) I give permission for my responses to be used in the report resulting from the research, but not for them to be attributed to me by name.
c) I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

4. I agree for my interviews to be recorded in audio format, with the understanding that these recordings will be used only for analysis by the researcher and will not be published or broadcast. No other use will be made of them without my written permission, and no one outside the Information School will be allowed access to the original recordings.

5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

6. I agree to take part in the above research project.

________________________  __________________  __________________
Name of Participant        Date                  Signature
(or legal representative)

________________________  __________________  __________________
Name of person taking consent  Date                  Signature
(if different from lead researcher)

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead Researcher</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

Copies:

*Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project’s main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.*
Ethics application form

University Research Ethics Application Form
for Undergraduate & Postgraduate-Taught Students

This form has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

Complete this form if you are an undergraduate or a postgraduate-taught student who plans to undertake a research project which requires ethics approval via the University Ethics Review Procedure.

Your Supervisor decides if ethics approval is required and, if required, which ethics review procedure (e.g. University, NHS, Alternative) applies.

If the University’s procedure applies, your Supervisor decides if your proposed project should be classed as ‘low risk’ or potentially ‘high risk’.

*PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR DEPARTMENT MAY USE A VARIATION OF THIS FORM: PLEASE CHECK WITH THE ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR IN YOUR DEPARTMENT*

This form should be accompanied, where appropriate, by all Information Sheets / Covering Letters / Written Scripts which you propose to use to inform the prospective participants about the proposed research, and/or by a Consent Form where you need to use one.

Further guidance on how to apply is at:

www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure/review-procedure

Guidance on the possible routes for obtaining ethics approval (i.e. on the University Ethics Review Procedure, the NHS procedure and the Social Care Research Ethics Committee, and the Alternative procedure) is at: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure/ethics-approval
Once you have completed this research ethics application form in full, and other documents where appropriate, check that your name, the title of your research project and the date is contained in the footer of each page.

**If your Supervisor has classed the project as ‘low risk’:**

Email this form, together with other documents where applicable, to your Supervisor; and

Sign and date *Annex 1* of this form and provide a paper copy to your Supervisor.

**Important Note for Supervisors:**

Following the ethics review the Supervisor must provide the academic department’s Ethics Administrator with a copy of the ‘low risk’ research ethics application that s/he reviewed and a completed Ethics Reviewer’s Comments Form indicating the ethics decision that s/he took in relation to it. The Ethics Reviewer’s Comments Form can be downloaded here: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/further-guidance/universityprocedure2/reviewersc](www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/further-guidance/universityprocedure2/reviewersc) The Ethics Administrator reserves the right to consult the Chair of the academic department’s Ethics Review Panel (or equivalent) of s/he has concerns that projects classed as low risk should in fact have been classed as potentially high risk.

**If your Supervisor has classed the project as potentially ‘high risk’:**

Email this form, together with other documents where applicable, to your department’s Ethics Administrator; and

Ask your Supervisor to sign and date *Annex 2* of this form and provide a paper copy of it to your department’s Ethics Administrator.

Ethics Administrators are listed at:

[www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.99105!/file/Ethics-Administrators.pdf](www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.99105!/file/Ethics-Administrators.pdf)
I confirm that I have read the current version of the University of Sheffield
‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal
Data and Human Tissue’, as shown on the University’s research ethics website
at: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy

A1. Title of research project: A History of the Information School at the University of
Sheffield

A2. Name of Student: Melanie Benson

Department: Information School Email: mtbenson1@shef.ac.uk
Tel.: 07763652461

Name of Supervisor: Peter Willett

A3. Proposed Project Duration:

Start date: 7 April 2012 End date: 3 September 2012

A4. Mark ‘X’ in one or more of the following boxes if your research:

- involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness

- involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)
involves children or young people aged under 18 years

involves using samples of human biological material collected before for another purpose

involves taking new samples of human biological material (e.g. blood, tissue) *

involves testing a medicinal product *

involves taking new samples of human biological material (e.g. blood, tissue) *

involves additional radiation above that required for clinical care *

involves investigating a medical device *

* If you have marked boxes marked * then you also need to obtain confirmation that appropriate University insurance is in place. To do this email insurance@shef.ac.uk and request a copy of the ‘Clinical Trial Insurance Application Form’.

It is recommended that you familiarise yourself with the University’s Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue before completing the following questions. Please note that if you provide sufficient information about the research (what you intend to do, how it will be carried out and how you intend to minimise any risks), this will help the ethics reviewers to make an informed judgement quickly without having to ask for further details.
A5. Briefly summarise:

The project’s aims and objectives:

(this must be in language comprehensible to a lay person)

To coincide with the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Information School at the University of Sheffield, the department has suggested a dissertation to research and report the history and development of the Information School. This has not previously been documented. The research aim is to document the history of the School, its evolution and growth, and in passing, if time permits, the contribution that the School and its members have made to the field of library and information science.

The project’s methodology:

(this must be in language comprehensible to a lay person)

This research will involve interviews with key past and present academic, administrative and support staff, alumni, previous Heads of Department, and other important figures in the development of the Information School. Desk research will be undertaken from the department’s administrative records and archives, where possible, including annual reports, degree programme schedules and outlines, and dissertation projects spanning the life of the School. Another important source will be articles and editorials taken from journals (e.g. Journal of Information Science, Library and Information History, ASLIB Proceedings) and other publications such as CILIP Update. Books such as the British Librarianship and Information Work series (Ashgate) will also be consulted.

A6. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

None

A7. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project? (especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)

No

If yes, explain how these issues will be managed.
A8. How will the potential participants in the project be:

Identified?

Suggestions from current staff members (notably PW) and from interviewees; from articles and other literature to identify key figures related to the School.

Approached?

Via email where possible; otherwise by letter.

Recruited?

Confirmation of interest and signature of consent form.

A9. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

[ ] YES  [ ] NO

If informed consent or consent is NOT to be obtained please explain why. Further guidance is at: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policy-notes/consent

A9.1. This question is only applicable if you are planning to obtain informed consent:

How do you plan to obtain informed consent? (i.e. the proposed process?):

Participants will be sent an information sheet and consent form prior to interview. For interviews in person, participants will sign a copy of the consent form when the interview is conducted. For telephone interviews, participants will indicate their consent at the time of the interview. Participants will be given signed copies of the information sheet and consent form for their records.

A10. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

Data will be controlled, stored and analysed by the lead researcher, in the form of recorded interviews. The project supervisor may have access to the data.
A11. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

No

A12. Will the research involve the production of recorded media such as audio and/or video recordings?

A12.1. This question is only applicable if you are planning to produce recorded media:

How will you ensure that there is a clear agreement with participants as to how these recorded media may be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?

A question will be included on the consent form indicating the participant’s consent to storage and analysis of audio recordings by the lead researcher for purposes of documentation only, not for publication or broadcast.

Guidance on a range of ethical issues, including safety and well-being, consent and anonymity, confidentiality and data protection are available at:

www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policy-notes
For Undergraduate & Postgraduate-Taught Students

**Student Declaration**

(The student completes Annex 1 if the Supervisor has classed the student’s proposed research project as ‘low risk’)

The Supervisor needs to receive an electronic copy of the form, and other documents where appropriate, plus a signed, dated paper copy of this Annex 1 ‘the Student Declaration’.

Full Research Project Title: **A History of the Information School at the University of Sheffield**

In signing this Student Declaration I am confirming that:

The research ethics application form for the above-named project is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

The above-named project will abide by the University’s ‘Good Research Practice Standards’: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/good](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/good)

The above-named project will abide by the University’s ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy)

Subject to the above-named project being ethically approved I undertake to adhere to any ethics conditions that may be set.

I will inform my Supervisor of significant changes to the above-named project that have ethical consequences.
I will inform my Supervisor if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.

I understand that personal data about me as a researcher on the research ethics application form will be held by those involved in the ethics review process (e.g. my Supervisor and the Ethics Administrator) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.

I understand that this project cannot be submitted for ethics approval in more than one department, and that if I wish to appeal against the decision made, this must be done through the original department.

Name of Supervisor: Peter Willett

Name of student: Melanie Benson

Signature of student: Melanie Benson

Date: 7 April 2012
For Undergraduate & Postgraduate-Taught Students

Supervisor Declaration

(The Supervisor completes Annex 2 if s/he has classed the student’s proposed research project as potentially ‘high risk’)

The Ethics Administrator needs to receive an electronic copy of the form, and other documents where appropriate, plus a signed, dated paper copy of this Annex 2 ‘the Supervisor Declaration’.

Full Research Project Title: \textbf{insert name}

In signing this Supervisor Declaration I am confirming that:

The research ethics application form for the above-named project is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

The above-named project will abide by the University’s ‘Good Research Practice Standards’: \url{www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/good}

The above-named project will abide by the University’s ‘Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue’: \url{www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy}

Subject to the above-named project being ethically approved I will undertake to ensure that the student adheres to any ethics conditions that may be set.

The student or the Supervisor will undertake to inform the Ethics Administrator of significant changes to the above-named project that have ethical consequences.
The student or the Supervisor will undertake to inform the Ethics Administrator if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.

I understand that personal data about the student and/or myself on the research ethics application form will be held by those involved in the ethics review process (e.g. the Ethics Administrator and/or reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.

I understand that this project cannot be submitted for ethics approval in more than one department, and that if I and/or the student wish to appeal against the decision made, this must be done through the original department.

Name of Supervisor: **insert name**

Name of student: **insert name**

Signature of Supervisor: **sign here**

Date: **insert date**