An Investigation into User Experience and Perceptions of Special Collections

A study submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA Librarianship at THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD by STEPHEN CLATWORTHY

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Abstract

Background

Academic libraries regularly conduct user satisfaction surveys as a means of evaluating service provision. However, the practice of conducting surveys has not previously been common in Special Collections departments, with limited literature on the subject. The present research adds to this emerging field. The effect of ‘barriers’ to use of Special Collections, and the potential of Special Collections to engage a wider audience, are two issues raised in the professional literature with which the research was particularly concerned.

Aims

The study aimed to investigate the experiences and perceptions of Special Collections users at the University of Leeds, with a view to exploring barriers to use, and the potential for broader user engagement including events, exhibitions and general interest visits.

Methods

A questionnaire was designed, incorporating aspects from user surveys currently implemented by academic libraries. The questionnaire was handed out to Special Collections users during two four-week periods, in June and July 2013, and March and April 2014. 100 completed questionnaires were returned in total during the data collection periods.

Results

Most participants reflected positively on their experience of using the Special Collections department, and did not encounter barriers or significant problems. Many
noted the high standards of customer service, which enabled some participants to overcome minor difficulties. Participants were not opposed to the idea of visiting Special Collections for reasons other than academic research, but associated the department primarily with that kind of usage. Certain responses raised issues for the department, such as undergraduate students expressing a lack of familiarity with Special Collections.

Conclusions

Barriers to use of Special Collections at the University of Leeds were not found to be prevalent. Findings indicated that user-focused customer service can assist Special Collections departments in reducing the impact of the ordinary inconveniences associated with accessing rare materials. Special Collections has the potential to engage broader audiences; however, as it primarily associated with academic use, publicity and outreach work may need to be undertaken to communicate the availability of Special Collections to a wider range of visitors.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Across the vast accumulation of writing about libraries in recent times, changing circumstances are often put forward as the underlying framework by which reflections, ideas and proposals should be understood. Cultural, technological and professional challenges have been persistent catalysts for development in library services. Library users encounter an ever-widening range of information resources and varying means of access (Brophy, 2005). Today, Special Collections departments must consider their role, and strive to flourish, within this shifting landscape.

The global economic recession of 2008 has occasioned changes to the funding of higher education in the UK. This process has not only restricted budgets; it has been taken up as an opportunity to realign institutional aims and values (Mandelson, 2010; Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2014). For example, there has been focus on articulating the societal value of higher education (Russell Group, 2012) and assessing the impact of research (Research Excellence Framework, 2014). Universities have been encouraged to pursue new avenues of funding, including greater private sector engagement (Russell Group, 2012a). Students have been posited as customers (Coughlan, 2011), central to university policy and expecting value for money in return for their fees (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). Meanwhile, technological advances such as wireless broadband and mobile devices have created new expectations of access that present challenges to university libraries, who play an important role in delivering the student experience (Ipsos Mori, 2009). Amidst these shifts in focus and expectation, Special Collections departments find they must be responsive in various ways, such as channelling resources to meet their users’ evolving needs, aligning themselves with the aims of their parent institution, building partnerships within and beyond the university, and articulating their value to a wider audience (Dooley et al., 2013).

In recent times, university libraries have increasingly made use of customer feedback as a way of developing services which meet the changing needs of library users.
(Ipsos Mori, 2009). However, formal methods of service assessment have not commonly been undertaken by Special Collections departments. There have been calls to develop the appropriate tools and a culture of assessment within the profession, in order to achieve measures of performance and impact that can be communicated to interested parties both within the institution and beyond (Dupont & Yakel, 2010).

Research into the experience of Special Collections customers may assist the department, the academic library and the university in understanding the best ways to benefit from the unique services and historical material provided by Special Collections departments. It may also help staff understand the day-to-day priorities of customers, and shed light on whether the perceived barriers to use of Special Collections material are a cause for concern.

1.2 Rationale

The subject matter for this dissertation is motivated by the researcher’s professional background, having worked in a customer service role at a busy Special Collections department for three years. This has involved working alongside staff who are keen to develop service improvements, but do not have consolidated feedback from users as a basis upon which to do so. As academic libraries have demonstrated, the process of learning about users’ expectations and experiences can help staff provide better service, and in times of financial constraints, channel resources more effectively (Research Information Network, 2010).

Research involving feedback from customers of Special Collections is quite rare. Previous dissertations in this area, including Smith (2005), Tovell (2005) and Phillips (2002), have focussed on interviewing professionals. This research is founded on the intention of gathering users’ perspectives, and seeing how these correspond to issues raised in the literature and by professionals.

The research undertaken for this dissertation will take the form of a case study at the University of Leeds Special Collections department. Performing a case study allows
for a manageable project, and Special Collections at Leeds provides a good example within the sector, being engaged with many of the issues discussed. The department houses over 200,000 rare books, and hundreds of thousands of manuscripts and archives (University of Leeds Special Collections, 2013). It holds collections designated to be of national importance in English Literature, Cookery, the Leeds Russian Archive, the Liddle First and Second World War Archive, and the Romany Collection. The department is run by seven full-time and eight part-time staff: It receives between 2000 and 3000 visits per year. In terms of its collection material, and the size of the organisation, it is comparable to other departments such as those at The University of Manchester, University College London, and The University of Durham.

1.3 Definition of Special Collections

The term ‘special collections’ is commonly used to refer both to a particular kind of library department, and the physical material such a department collects and manages. A recent definition can be found in a ‘Survey of Special Collections and Archives in the United Kingdom and Ireland’:

“We defined special collections as library and archival materials in any format (e.g., rare books, manuscripts, photographs, institutional archives) that are generally characterised by their artifactual or monetary value, physical format, uniqueness or rarity, and/or an institutional commitment to long-term preservation and access. They generally are housed in a separate unit with specialised security and user services. Circulation of materials usually is restricted.” (Dooley et al., 2013, p24).

Departments operating under this name can exist in a variety of contexts, for a variety of purposes. They can be found in museums, national libraries, public libraries, learned societies, art galleries, cathedrals and elsewhere; however in the UK and Ireland, most are located in universities (Dooley et al., 2013). In this research, ‘Special Collections’ will be used to refer to institutional departments, while ‘special collections’ refers to the physical materials they keep.
The balance between access and preservation, which Traister (2000, p.60) refers to as “the inescapable tension at the heart of special collections librarianship”, determines the characteristics commonly associated with Special Collections departments. Holdings require conditions of controlled light, temperature and humidity to be stored adequately, and their security is also a key concern for staff. Therefore, collections are kept in stacks and strong rooms, separate from the spaces used by staff and visitors. This necessitates the provision of a reading room, in which staff can bring material for visitors to consult; as well as instructing them in the correct care of items, monitoring user behaviour, and assisting visitors with finding aids such as catalogues, indexes and databases, (printed and electronic) with which they may be unfamiliar. Instructions for using special collections, such as those recommended by the British Library, include leaving your belongings in separate storage area, only allowing pencil use, and forbidding food and drink (British Library, 2013).

Material holdings in Special Collections departments vary greatly. They may contain any amount, small or vast, of print and archival collections across a range of subjects and interests, deemed to be of institutional, local, national or international importance. University Special Collections departments commonly include books published before a certain date, those deemed unfit for the shelves of the main library due to their physical condition, and those of particular value, rarity or significance across a range of subjects. A special collection may be specific, belonging to an institution such as Durham Cathedral or the Natural History Museum for example. For the purposes of this research, the building environment encountered by the user, and the process of their experience in accessing material, are the key aspects of Special Collections departments under consideration.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

- Aim: to investigate the experiences and perceptions of Special Collections users at the University of Leeds, with a view to exploring barriers to use, and the potential for broader usage including events, exhibitions and general interest visits.

The research has the following objectives:
1) To survey Special Collections users, investigating how they perceive, value and experience the service provided, identifying strengths and weaknesses.

2) To establish the extent to which visitors to Special Collections experience barriers to use, both psychological and practical, as discussed in the literature, and to examine any effect they have.

3) To investigate the potential for broader use of Special Collections, including exhibitions and general interest.

4) To identify service priorities based on user feedback.

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

The introduction is followed by a literature review in chapter 2, examining the contemporary professional context for Special Collections, and the reasons for conducting a user survey. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology, including the questionnaire design and methods of data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the survey results, beginning with an analysis of quantitative data, before reporting on qualitative data. Chapter 5 discusses the main findings from the survey. Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation by summarising key points, considering the limitations of the project, reviewing the aims and objectives, and proposing further research.
2. Literature Review

2.1 The Academic Library Context

Special Collections departments exist within a wider context of academic library provision. In recent years, many academic libraries have adopted an increasingly customer-focused approach to service delivery (Ipsos Mori, 2009). Users have been put at the centre of library operations, and surveying their perceptions has been increasingly utilised as a method of evaluating services (McKnight, 2008). The data acquired, alongside providing feedback on current service standards, can help to inform the operational priorities and future direction of the library, by providing a basis for evidence-based decision making (Esson, Stevenson, Gildea, Roberts, 2012). Crawford (2006) states that it is now difficult to imagine an institution that does not practice some form of feedback process, such has been the progress of the evaluation movement. This development has affirmed the necessity of libraries to engage with their users, in order to understand and manage services effectively.

In the UK, the National Student Survey also asks students about their experience of library services. A library that scores highly in the survey can contribute, via this measure, to their parent institution’s position in higher education league table rankings (Stanley, 2009). This can, in turn, provide an important means of attracting new students and revenue to a university (Locke, Verbik, Richardson & King, 2008). Numerous university library building projects, redevelopments and expansions across the UK reflect the desire of institutions to invest in resources that will have a positive impact upon students’ experience (Universities UK, 2013). New architectural designs have responded to recent developments in learning and teaching, and moved to accommodate the present and future needs of users (Shaw, 2013). In 2014 The Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey reported that university libraries scored more positively than any other aspect of student life (SCONUL, 2014).

These developments have occurred at a time when academic libraries are faced with a pressing need to articulate their value to their parent institution, in order to maintain their share of tightened university budgets (Barr, 2012). Nicholas, Rowlands, Jubb
and Jarmali (2010) investigated the impact of the economic downturn on university libraries in the US and the UK. They note that in a context in which libraries are under pressure to demonstrate value, many directors are open to viewing the situation as an opportunity; to re-evaluate library practices, and redefine the library’s role. However, they also report that few transformative projects, intended to yield large-scale efficiency savings, were in place at the time of writing, and state that libraries should seek to collaborate and share ideas in order to make savings while responding to changing user expectations.

2.2 Opportunities for Special Collections

As university libraries seek to demonstrate value to their parent institutions, Special Collections departments are called upon to do the same (Cullingford, 2011). In a time of reduced budgets, Special Collections risk being seen as an unnecessary luxury, detached from the aims of the academic library and the university (Potter and Holley, 2010). Enabling access to Special Collections materials, and promoting their use, are therefore of great importance.

The situation calls upon staff to engage in advocacy; championing their institutional value and unique accomplishments which otherwise, damagingly, may go unnoticed (Cullingford, 2011). For Pritchard (2009), Special Collections have long been the jewels in the crowns of research libraries, providing an important differentiating characteristic between universities whose main library stock is increasingly homogenised. Potter and Holley (2010) state that an outstanding special collection can grant a university prestige, as it may attract researchers from around the globe. Cullingford (2011) puts forward that Special Collections can also constitute a unique selling point in a competitive higher education marketplace.

Unique educational experience can be added to research projects by enabling library users to engage with primary materials at Special Collections departments (Krause, 2010). Research by Dupont and Yakel (2010) showed that from ‘student researcher’ questionnaires responded to by 11 undergraduate classes at two universities, 92 percent had not previously used Special Collections or archives, and 96 percent
stated that they would return if they had a further project that would benefit from the use of primary sources. Dupont and Yakel state that while a principle argument aimed against Special Collections has been that their holdings are esoteric and outreach unimportant, these findings indicate that significant value can be gained from encouraging undergraduate engagement with collections materials.

Waters (2009) notes the importance of ensuring that Special Collections departments retain a commitment to research via openness and collaboration, and that the desire to demonstrate institutional distinctiveness does not result in silo-like boundaries that limit scholarly productivity. Overholt (2013) believes that Special Collections departments will not survive as a prestigious ornament to the university; they must position themselves as central to research (for example, via cultivating undergraduate interest in primary resources), thereby demonstrating their value to the university’s mission.

However, in the researcher’s own professional experience at The University of Leeds Special Collections, ‘ornamental’ qualities of Special Collections can also enable the department to contribute to university-wide aims. For example, exhibiting highlights from the collections, including valuable items such as a First Folio of Shakespeare’s plays and illuminated medieval manuscripts, can make an impression on VIP visitors, alumni and potential donors, assisting in the University’s fundraising. The department has contributed to the University’s international profile by engaging with academic events, such as the Leeds International Medieval Congress; curating exhibitions of relevant material and hosting lectures. The department has also held public events, as part of city-wide occasions, including ‘Light Night’, when Leeds’ various arts centres open late with a special programme of exhibitions and performances. In these undertakings, and others, the department has demonstrated an ability to help meet aims stated in the University’s Strategy Map (University of Leeds, 2011) including ‘enhance our standing as an international university’, ‘increase our impact on a local to global scale’, and meeting the expectations of key stakeholders.
2.3 Recent Developments in Special Collections and Archive Services

Recent professional challenges and responses in the Special Collections and Archive sector are well reflected in the available literature. At the beginning of the 21st Century, Daniel Traister (2000) presented a polemical essay, calling into question the ideas and practices that have historically shaped the services provided by Special Collections departments. The article draws from experience and anecdote in critiquing the sector, which has been, in that author’s view, focussed near-exclusively on collections care and not on the requirements of users. Traister paints a picture in which reclusive Special Collections librarians appear determined to keep books and readers apart via a combination of institutional isolation and obstinance. In one example provided, the author recounts the experience of an expert scholar, required to read aloud to a librarian from a manuscript written in a hand difficult to decipher, in order to gain approval to view the document. Traister states,

“All of us know people who have been turned away from, had difficulties at, or experienced condescension, downright rudeness, or suspicion of their integrity, cleanliness, or general demeanor while trying to use -- or simply not been encouraged to think about using -- rare book and manuscript repositories” (Traister, 2000).

The author concludes that while Special Collections may survive into the future, it is only worth them doing so if they embrace new forms of openness and a greater commitment to access. A vividly conveyed argument, it is one that has provoked many responses (Cullingford, 2011). While today’s institutions would hope that the experiences of Traister and his colleagues during their careers will not be repeated, the case for improved access and greater outward engagement remain central to the current vision articulated by Special Collections professionals. For example, Overholt (2013) lists five theses on the future of Special Collections: distribution, openness, disintermediation, transformation and advocacy. Each responds in some way to external factors, including new user behaviours and expectations regarding web access and digital content, the move towards open access publishing, institutional collaboration, and reaching out to new audiences. The general move to a more outward-looking mission is perhaps summed up by Carter (2009), “We are
redefining ourselves from the gatekeepers and interpreters of history to facilitators of access”.

2.4. Access and Barriers at Special Collections Departments

The provision of unique collections, rare books and archives in higher education requires a negotiated balance between access and preservation. The compromise involved in approaching these aims can result in perceived barriers to use of Special Collections, which is of great concern to staff, as they attempt to increase user engagement and demonstrate institutional value. Overholt (2013, p16) states, “It ought to be our primary purpose at all times to minimise barriers to use.”

Torre (2008) describes a personal experience of encountering barriers to using special collections materials as an undergraduate student at The University of South Carolina. The author found that the procedures for requesting items were not explained to her, and so represented a level of defence, a question mark over whether she deserved to access special collections material at all. The department’s luxurious appearance, potentially a sign of prestige, was experienced as intimidating and alienating. The author reflects that while some of her fears were unfounded, some were based on an image that special collections often wish to convey: an ‘ivory tower’ exclusivity that appeals to researchers and VIP donors. This same exclusivity, however, can be uninviting to other user groups.

Torre contends that rare books, whatever their monetary value, are of little significance to an institution until a human being engages with them. She argues that the Special Collections departments need to be demystified within the university; that Special Collections librarians should develop opportunities to engage with undergraduates, and enable them to feel that the department is a place for them, not a restrictive environment reserved solely for academics.

Torre’s experience as a student, and her perception of the character of a Special Collections department, will not of course be common to all undergraduates, across different institutions. However, the underlying concern of her article is to emphasise,
like Traister (2000), and Panofsky and Moir (2005), the dangers and limitations of a historical tendency within the Special Collections profession to put collection care, and associated procedures, before the needs of users; and to appear predominantly concerned with assisting experienced academic researchers, neglecting the full scope of their potential audience. Undergraduate use, in particular, is ever more important as students seek excellent library resources in return for increased fees (Universities UK, 2013). At the University of Leeds, Special Collections are viewed as a route to engage with undergraduate students that will develop a substantial research interest, which compels them to remain at the University for postgraduate study, and beyond.

In a talk entitled ‘Survive and Thrive’, Rachel Beckett (2013) describes her experiences since being appointed as Head of Special Collections at the University of Manchester in 2009. Not arriving from a Special Collections background, she found that while standards of collection care were very high, the department was not fulfilling its potential in terms of engaging with the scholarly community of the university, and addressing wider audiences. Beckett describes how the department has since worked to become a key part in teaching and learning at the library, and engage in numerous public outreach events. She describes the culture she encountered in 2009 to be passive, cautious, protective, and there being “lots of barriers” (Beckett, 2013). The movement away from this has brought successes, but is seen as an ongoing process, involving hard work and significant change.

Cullingford (2011) identifies two strands of barriers that prevent widened access to Special Collections. Firstly, physical aspects, that can involve libraries in remote spaces, poor signage, inadequate study areas or, as Torre found, intimidating environments. Secondly, managerial aspects, whereby procedures are over-complicated or poorly explained, and allow security and conservation requirements to define a difficult and off-putting service. In view of the latter strand, Beckett (2013) initiated a review of reading room procedures at the University of Manchester Special Collections via a lean project. Lean projects involve a method of conceptualising workflows that allows staff to track processes, and identify areas in which to reduce wasted time and effort (University of St Andrews, 2012). As a result, the department in Manchester was able to improve efficiency, reducing item retrieval times by 50%.
However, it is impossible to circumvent entirely the particular requirements of using Special Collections. At the University of Leeds Special Collections department, access procedures include: controlled entry to the department, via a secure door which is operated and monitored by staff; the necessity of filling out forms to request items; prohibiting the use of pens (pencils are provided); leaving bags and personal items outside the reading room, and following instructions on the proper handling of items and use of book supports. These are common requirements to frequent users of archives and Special Collections, shared by, for example, the British Library reading rooms (British Library, 2014). However, there is a concern that to new users, these measures present a conceptual as well as practical difficulty. The University of Bradford Special Collections has published an access policy document (Cullingford 2014) which describes ways in which the department is working to widen participation, improve access and overcome barriers including geography, cost, perceptions and disability. A commitment to removing barriers is listed as one of the department’s key principles.

2.5 Access and Barriers Online

An important aspect of Special Collections use is the availability of means to search and discover materials online. Backlogs of uncatalogued and under-processed material in Special Collections were found to be a major concern across the sector by the Association of Research Libraries in 2003, as discussed in their report ‘Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers’ (Association of Research Libraries, 2003). In 2013, a survey of Special Collections and Archives in the UK (Dooley et al., 2013) discovered that many backlogs had been reduced, though others continued to grow; and as demand for use of material has increased across the board, one third of archival collections are not discoverable in online catalogues.

In recent years, online searching and the prospect of accessing digitised materials have provided new routes of user engagement for Special Collections (Prochaska, 2009). Expectations have also been raised, and Special Collections managers now feel under pressure to make more collections available to search; and more materials
available to view digitally (Dooley et al., 2013).

2.6 Outreach and Expanding Audiences

Across Special Collections literature, outreach is viewed as a way of overcoming barriers to access, developing partnerships, and demonstrating impact. Special Collections departments find themselves in a context where many cultural institutions, such as museums and galleries, place great importance on marketing and outreach (Conway & Whitelock, 2007; Lange, 2010; Korey, 2013). Academic libraries have also become increasingly engaged in outreach activities (Dennis, 2012). Online tools such as social networking have provided librarians with new opportunities to form relationships with their customers, gaining feedback as well as promoting their services (Potter, 2012).

Similarly, a drive to connect with users and market services has become prevalent in Special Collections, as stated by Henderson, (1999), Harris and Weller, (2012), and Overholt, (2013). Overholt remarks “We have much to offer, but it is clear that assertive salesmanship and repeated demonstration of that value are crucial to our future” (Overholt, 2013, p19).

Henderson (1999) discusses the comments of writer William Gass, speaking in 1998 at the ACRL President’s Program on ‘The Value of Values’, who dismissed outreach as a wasteful diversion; a distraction from the maintenance of academic and learning standards, which should be libraries’ principal concern. However, such a critical view of outreach as a whole is difficult to find within recent library literature, demonstrating a professional consensus on its potential utility.

Sommer (2012) and Birkwood and Herbert (2011) have discussed the need to broaden audiences, and engage the general public. Potter and Holley state that “rare materials have a museum aspect” and should be more widely accessible (Potter and Holley, 2010, p152). Smith, Hunter and Eckwright (2009) present case studies of public programming, drawing on academic library collections to engage new users. Traister (2003) argues that a positive approach to visitors from the general public
will have a spillover effect and improve staff interaction with other user groups. Yet Basler (2005) mentions the practical difficulty of integrating public outreach with daily library tasks.

2.7 Measuring and Evaluating Special Collections Services

Like academic libraries, Special Collections have been called upon to develop ways of measuring their services in order to articulate their worth. Carter (2012) states that archivists and Special Collections librarians have previously articulated value by rhetorical and instinctive means, involving an assumed recognition of the intrinsic value of important collections. As today’s universities expect such collections not simply to be accumulated and kept, but to achieve demonstrable impact for the institution, the perceived research value of Special Collections needs to be supported by data gathered via assessment (Carter, 2012).

However, it is important that evaluation exercises in Special Collections are given due consideration, in order to be worthwhile. O’Gara, Walters and Putirskis (2010) identify that numerous statistics are kept in Special Collections departments which are not co-ordinated, or geared towards a specific outcome. Considering specifically the instructional sessions that Special Collections run, the authors state that many departments do not expand assessment of the success of these sessions beyond anecdotal feedback, and counting the number of items requested by users. They question what, without stating a desired outcome against which to measure success, this data can really tell a Special Collections department about its practices. Carter (2012) argues the importance of a strategic approach to assessment, identifying what is already known, what would like to be discovered, and how the accumulated data will be put to use. For Carter, if data is not used constructively, the processes of gathering and analysis merely represent a drain on resources.

Though Special Collections have traditionally lacked a culture of assessment, Dupont and Yakel (2010), and Yakel and Tibbo (2010), see the current climate as an opportunity to develop useful ways of measuring services. These authors have worked towards developing Archival Metrics Toolkits, which consist of a series of
pre-formatted questionnaires and data analysis templates, aimed at assessing different aspects of Special Collections services. These areas include researchers, student researchers, online finding aids, websites, teaching support, economic impact, website/access tools, and focus groups. While past means of assessment in Special Collections have tended focused on collection use, the toolkits reflect the need for departments to investigate users’ perspectives and experiences. As standardized instruments, they allow for the comparison of data and performance between institutions, enabling librarians to identify best practices and improve levels of service (Archival Metrics, 2014). The toolkits are available to download, though at the time of writing, the researcher was unable to find any published reports of using the toolkits in an institutional context.

A study undertaken using different means was conducted by Valerie Harris, at the Special Collections and Archives Department of the University of Illinois, Chicago (Harris, 2008). A survey was developed based on questions from, Libqual+, a software package of standardised evaluation services, used by academic libraries to gain feedback from their users (Libqual+, 2014). Created with Survey Monkey, Harris’ survey was sent via email to 671 users registered between January 2007 and July 2008. There were 145 respondents.

Some of the findings listed by Harris correspond to common professional concerns indicated by the OCLC survey of Special Collections and Archives in the UK (Dooley et al., 2013). Users would like more digital resources, longer opening hours, freedom to do their own photocopying, scanning and photography, and for ‘hidden’ uncatalogued collections to be made available. Harris notes how users expressed a strong desire for research assistance from experienced librarians; but were not keen on Special Collections tutorials. The environment, rules and regulations of Special Collections did not appear to present a problem for the majority of respondents. This final point is somewhat at odds with the perception that Special Collections departments necessarily present off-putting barriers. Nevertheless, Harris concludes by re-iterating such concerns, quoting Traister, and emphasising the importance of continuing to shift the culture of Special Collections towards a user-centred approach. Harris states, “By improving services based on the study of existing users’
feedback, it may be possible to reduced barriers faced by current and potential audiences” (Harris, 2009, p83).
3. Methodology

3.1 General Methodological Approach

The approach to research methods was prompted by both deductive and inductive concerns. In deductive terms, the researcher intended to investigate the issue, raised in the literature, of users experiencing barriers to Special Collections use. The researcher also wanted to discover how users perceive Special Collections, and whether their views corresponded to some of the critical viewpoints and concerns expressed by Special Collections professionals in the literature. From an inductive standpoint, the researcher also wanted to find out from Special Collections users what they thought to be the strengths and weaknesses of the Special Collections department at the University of Leeds, and conduct a customer satisfaction survey that would highlight both areas of achievement and problematic issues. To achieve these goals, the research was conducted via both quantitative and qualitative means, in a survey carried out by written questionnaire.

3.2 Data Collection

The first data collection period was held for four weeks between June and July in 2013. However, analysis of the returned forms showed a small number of undergraduate participants. Undergraduate use of, and experience of Special Collections is a significant issue raised in the literature, and therefore an important part of the present research Therefore, a second period of data collection was held during the academic term, for four weeks in March and April, 2014. A combined total of 100 completed questionnaires were collected over the two data collection periods.

3.3 Case Study

Special Collections at the University of Leeds provided the subject for a case study. Case studies investigating user satisfaction at academic libraries, via survey
techniques, are prevalent in the literature, and conducted around the globe at a range of institutions. Against this background of widespread user-based research in academic libraries, it seemed apt to the researcher to extend the survey-based assessment format into use by Special Collections.

Bryman (2008) argues that some research which identifies itself as a case study is in fact more akin to cross-sectional research; in those instances where the setting is merely a backdrop to the findings, not the object of interest in itself. However, Bryman also notes that it can be hard to determine whether a study is strictly speaking cross-sectional, or a case study, and that research can often bear the hallmarks of both. This is true of the present research. The project was prompted by theories and concepts articulated about Special Collections departments in general, rather than the department at the University of Leeds in particular. However, the researcher’s professional experience at Leeds enabled the researcher to recognise that the department was engaging with issues raised across the sector.

A commonly expressed limitation of case study research is that findings cannot be generalised to other cases or populations (Bryman, 2008). That is true to of the present research, since Special Collections at the University of Leeds has, like every department, unique attributes. However, as the research is engaging in theories expressed throughout literature for the sector, it is intended that the findings will be of some wider interest.

A notable strength of the case study method, as stated by Gorman and Clayton (2005), is that it allows for an investigation of depth and thoroughness. By collecting a significant amount of data at a single institution, the researcher was able to examine the extent to which the general theories expressed in the literature arose in a particular setting.

3.4 Mixed Methods Research

Bryman (2008, p53) notes that case studies frequently employ both quantitative and qualitative methods of research. For this research, it was appropriate to use both
methods. The investigation intended to survey a relatively large group of people, asking questions about pre-determined themes, as suitable for quantitative data collection. At the same time, the survey also needed to provide the opportunity for individual feedback, and personal experience, via open questions; for which qualitative data collection was appropriate.

Gorman and Clayton (2005) state how a mixed methods approach can allow researchers to benefit from the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative data, while compensating for the inherent weaknesses in both. Fidel (2008) notes that mixed methods research can provide flexibility in the research, a comprehensive investigation of an issue, and insights that would be lacking from a single-method study. There are potential issues with this approach, however; in particular that poor quality research can fall short of following the basic principles of both methods (Morse, 2005). It is argued that such shortcoming can arise from the fact that the two methods offer different paradigms of research, which carry epistemological commitments not easily brought together (Bryman, 2008).

Gorman and Clayton (2005) point out that researchers must be aware of the complexities involved in mixed methods research, and carefully consider how and why both methods are used. There is a difference, for example, between combining results from both methods in a single report, and combining the data during analysis to produce “richer” findings (Gorman and Clayton, 2005, p13). In this research, data from both methods was analysed separately, then used together in developing ideas upon which to reflect.

3.5 Methods of Investigation

3.5.1 Literature Review

The literature review was important in understanding professional attitudes towards the current challenges facing Special Collections departments. The way in which certain issues are articulated as ‘barriers’, both in the literature and in the
researcher’s own professional experience, formed a starting point for the investigation.

While there is a burgeoning literature regarding customer service evaluation in academic libraries, relatively little user-centred research seemed to have been undertaken across the Special Collections and archives sector. As Dupont and Yakel (2010) mention, there has not previously been an established culture of assessment in this professional field. Therefore, conducting a user survey at Special Collections appeared to the researcher as a relevant and timely undertaking.

While the majority of literature discovered had been written in the United States, two recent publications of note allowed the researcher to gain a valuable overview of issues facing Special Collections departments in the UK. These were Survey of Special Collections in the United Kingdom and Ireland (Dooley, et al. 2013) and The Special Collections Handbook (Cullingford, 2011).

Methods for searching included: the databases Web of Knowledge and Emerald Insight; online searching via Google and Google Scholar; the library resources of the University of Leeds and the University of Sheffield; and bibliographic references.

3.5.2 Survey via Questionnaire

Questionnaires were completed by participants in the Special Collections reading room. May (2008) discusses the benefits and drawbacks of utilising self-completion questionnaires in research. Advantages include surveying a significant number of participants at low cost, enabling the anonymity of participants, allowing participants to respond to questions in their own time, and the lack of influence or direction that might be provided by the researcher during an interview. Disadvantages include the need to keep questions short and simple, the inability to follow up an issue in greater depth, and the potential for a low response rate.
3.5.2.1 Libqual+

The researcher took into consideration current forms of user survey undertaken by academic libraries, including The University of Leeds Library. Like many institutions, Leeds employs a Libqual+ survey to gain user feedback; the results of which are published online (University of Leeds Library, 2013). Since its development began at Texas A&M University in 2000, Libqual+ has gained global popularity as an assessment tool. In 2012, it was used by 1200 libraries across 28 countries (Libqual+, 2014).

Feedback data can be used as an evidence base upon which to guide future library developments and policy. For example, Gutierrez and Wang (2012) report on the use of Libqual+ survey results to improve services at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. Reflecting the capacity of Libqual+ to provide useful data both qualitatively and quantitatively, Greenwood and Watson (2011) discuss results of both kinds of data collection from Libqual+ surveys conducted between 2001 and 2010 at The University of Mississippi.

The present questionnaire adopts an aspect of the Libqual+ tool by organising service questions using three complementary categories: customer service, environment, and information resources. These three categories are represented in the questionnaire as sections G, H and I. The ‘customer service’ category focusses on interactions with staff, ‘environment’ addresses working space and facilities, while ‘information resources’ enquires about searching tools such as catalogues and handlists.

Similarly to Libqual+, the questionnaire makes use of Likert scales to gather quantitative data about participants’ opinions. However, Libqual+ measures user’s minimum expected level of service, desired level of service, and that which the user thinks is provided by an institution, by presenting three Likert scales for each question. Collecting such a quantity data in the present research would result in a considerably longer and more complex form to complete, and require significantly more analysis. The present questionnaire uses single, 5-point Likert scales to gauge user opinion. By including a number of questions in which participants can provide
qualitative feedback, it is hoped the questionnaire design thereby allows users to express more detailed opinions regarding service provision in writing.

3.5.2.2 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire comprises of two parts. The first collects quantitative data, the second, qualitative data.

Quantitative data collection begins by gathering information about the participants, such as their user group, and the frequency of their visits to Special Collections. This is followed by a series of questions in which participants are asked to give opinions about Special Collections by marking a 5-point scale in response to statements. The first of these questions uses a semantic differential scale, the following questions use Likert scales. Two of these questions, which enquire about reasons for visiting Special Collections, also provide the option for participants to add extra categories to those listed on the form. A question asking participants how they found out about Special Collections presents a list of options with the instruction to tick all that apply. Users can also add their own reasons/methods as subsequent categories to this question, in addition to those listed on the questionnaire.

The second part of the questionnaire collects qualitative data. It consists of six open questions, with space to write detailed responses. The first two questions ask participants about barriers, psychological or practical, that they may have experienced in using Special Collections. The following two questions ask users about the environment and customer service at the department. The fifth question asks what participants like and/or dislike about Special Collections. The final question asks what participants think could be changed.

The questions were designed to provide data pertaining to different areas of enquiry: perceptions of the department; reasons for current and potential use; participants’ experiences in accessing collections material; participants’ service priorities, and general customer feedback. A key area of questioning, based on issues raised in the
literature, is whether participants experience barriers in their use of Special Collections.

The quantitative data section was intended to provide insight into general perceptions, experiences and trends among users. The qualitative data section allowed participants to describe specific issues they had encountered, and contribute more in-depth feedback.

A draft version of the questionnaire was discussed with managerial staff at Special Collections, and piloted by colleagues within the library, as well as postgraduate students known to the researcher. Based on the feedback obtained, certain questions were re-written for greater clarity, and the layout was changed to make the form easier to understand.

The design of the questionnaire was altered following the first period of data collection. A small number of participants had needed to correct their answers, due to a counter-intuitive alignment of the scale, which changed between the questions asking for levels of agreement, and those asking for levels of importance. For the second data collection period, a new version was created so that the scales were aligned, i.e., ‘very important’ was put on the same side as ‘strongly agree’ in previous questions. These two versions of the questionnaire are shown in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

3.6 Data analysis

Data gathered via quantitative means was analysed using basic statistical methods. The mean responses of different user groups to certain questions were compared, in order to look for any significant differences. Most of the questions providing quantitative data were analysed by comparing how the responses to different categories / options within a particular section compared to each other. To present this information for analysis, the data was used to create a number of charts.
Data gathered via qualitative means was analysed in different ways. Much of the written feedback comprised of brief statements on a small range of topics. It was useful to examine quantitatively, in order to provide an overview of the survey response. To this end, comments were coded as stating a positive experience or reflection, stating a negative experience or reflection, or stating a desired improvement. The results of this process were analysed statistically, with regards to the overall survey, and individual questions.

Having read through and annotated the qualitative data, the researcher addressed individual questions in the qualitative section, listing the types of comments that were made in order to create an index, while also noting their respective frequency. Certain issues were raised in response to different questions by different users; for example, issues regarding the library catalogue and other searching aids appeared in answer to questions 1, 2, 5 and 6. As the number of issues raised was relatively small in regards to each individual question, the researcher analysed issues thematically, taking into account all responses on a similar theme raised in the qualitative part of the questionnaire.

In identifying categories and themes, the researcher worked inductively, while bearing in mind, via professional experience, the kinds of issues that would be likely to arise. Though there is the chance of bias in the development of these categories, the majority of the data consisted of short comments making a specific point, with little ambiguity. Certain longer responses are addressed individually in the analysis.

The most common responses were positive comments regarding the standard of customer service and the environment of Special Collections. In order to gauge the relative frequency of the different kinds of positive comment, this data has been presented in the analysis in the form of word clouds.

3.7 Limitations

A limitation of this research is the unique character and environment of Special Collections at the University of Leeds. Other departments, however similar in size
and operational outlook, will embody differences which mean the present findings cannot be generalised. However, it is hoped that by engaging with issues raised across the sector, the research may be considered useful beyond the University of Leeds.

Another limitation is that some potential barriers to using Special Collections have already been traversed by anyone who has entered the department and requested material. A useful study could be conducted by surveying a sample of university staff and students, including those who had never visited Special Collections, to see how many were aware of the department, and if anything other than lack of necessity had prevented them visiting.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Research was planned to respect the participants’ welfare, dignity and rights, in accordance with the University of Sheffield’s stated ethical principles (University of Sheffield, 2013). The study was classified as ‘low risk’. While the questionnaire gathered the thoughts and opinions of individuals, this was done so anonymously: the survey did not request any personal details, such as name, age or address. Information about the project was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire. Participants were advised to contact the researcher (email address provided), or ask a member Special Collections staff if they had any questions regarding the use of the information obtained, or the purpose of the project. Special Collections staff were informed about the research in person, and via email.

The introduction to the questionnaire also provided instructions, directing participants to fold completed surveys and post them into a sealed box in the Special Collections reception area. This box was be emptied at daily intervals by the researcher, with forms kept in a private folder.

Visitors who completed and returned the questionnaire were thereby agreeing to take part in the research, so a separate consent form was not required. The research ethics
application form is shown in Appendix 3. The certificate of approval is shown in Appendix 4.
4. Analysis

Data analysis will begin with quantitative data then move on to qualitative data, mirroring the sequence of the questionnaire.

4.1 Summary of Quantitative Results

The first part of the survey was designed to gather quantitative data. The completion rate for this part was high, providing a good basis for statistical analysis. The 100 returned questionnaires each presented 11 sections of quantitative questions; only 7% of these sections were returned with substantial missing data.

For reference in the analysis, the sections of the questionnaire are listed below:

Section A – Participant information
Section B – Perceptions of Special Collections
Section C - Who uses Special Collections?
Section D - What is Special Collections used for?
Section E – Experience of using Special Collections
Section F – Future use of Special Collections
Section G – Service priorities: Customer service
Section H – Service priorities: Environment
Section I – Service priorities: Information Resources
Section J – Service priorities: Departmental Aims
Section K – Finding Out About Special Collections

4.1.1 Section A: Participant Information

In the first two questions of Section A, participants indicated their status. These questions were designed with the existing data collections methods employed by Special Collections in mind. The department records certain data about its visitors, and this process includes grouping them by the following categories:
University of Leeds undergraduate  
University of Leeds postgraduate  
University of Leeds academic  
University of Leeds other staff member  
External undergraduate  
External postgraduate  
External academic  
User researching on behalf of ‘Non-Higher Education’ organisation (e.g. a commercial organisation)  
Private User  

The questionnaire replicated these categories so that it could be established how far the completed surveys reflect general use of Special Collections, in terms of user type. Figures 1 and 2 display a comparison between the membership of Special Collections users on average during the previous five academic years, and the distribution of membership status amongst survey participants. The survey includes a more even spread of different users than are represented in overall visitor numbers. For the department, undergraduate students are the most frequent visitors, followed by private users, and postgraduate students.
Figure 1: Status of Visitors to Special Collections on Average for the Academic Years 2008/9 to 2012/13
The group ‘University of Leeds Staff’ is not represented in the analysis. This status option was only selected by one participant, and done so in error: it becomes clear from qualitative responses later in this particular questionnaire that the participant is a University of Leeds academic. Therefore, this participant has been added to that group for the purposes of data analysis.

Section A asked participants how often they visited Special Collections in person, and how often they visited the Special Collections website. Figures 3 and 4 display the results.
Figure 3: Frequency of Visits to Special Collections

The results in Figure 3 show that most participants are infrequent visitors to Special Collections. Figure 4 shows the website to be of more regular use, however more than half of the participants use it infrequently.

Figure 4: Frequency of Visits to the Special Collections Website
Section A also asked participants whether they had subscribed to the Special Collections Twitter feed. Only 5 of the 100 participants had done so.

4.1.2 Section B: Perceptions of Special Collections

Section B surveys participants’ opinions regarding barriers to using Special Collections, and their perceptions of the department. They were asked to rate Special Collections on a semantic differential scale between 1 and 5 across a range of categories. The results are shown in Figure 5.

![Figure 5: Perceptions of Special Collections](image)

The results show that throughout the different categories, responses were positive. Most participants found Special Collections to be welcoming (as opposed to intimidating), and accommodating (as opposed to restrictive). Negative user experience of overly-restrictive rules, and the presence of an intimidating atmosphere, are two potential factors in barriers to Special Collections use, as discussed by Torre (2008), for example. It is notable that these were not encountered
as problems.

Participants also found Special Collections to be impressive and appealing, demonstrating the current and potential draw of the department.

Responses for ‘easy to find’, ‘easy to access’ and ‘easy to use’ were mainly positive. However, six participants indicated that the department was difficult to find, with two of the same participants also indicating difficulty of access (as represented in the columns for 4 and 5 on the scale). Of these six respondents, 5 were undergraduates (3 of whom belonged to the University of Leeds) and 1 was a private user. None of the six participants went on to describe these issues in their qualitative feedback. (In the qualitative section of the questionnaire, three other participants did mention issues regarding access to/locating the department, which will be mentioned later in the analysis).

Participants generally saw Special Collections as inclusive, though were less sure about this than other categories: it received the lowest number of ‘1’ ratings on the 5-point-scale. However, none of the participants rated the department as ‘exclusive’, as the category received no ratings of 4 or 5 on the scale. Furthermore, exclusivity was not raised as an issue in the qualitative comments.

The question of inclusivity was posed in response to the notion, as expressed by Torre (2008) and Traister (2000), that Special Collections departments can seem exclusive, reserved for some people but not others, and this characteristic may be a barrier to engaging wider audiences beyond the academic institution. However, as Special Collections is situated within a university library, its primary, academic user-base is self-evident. The results for this question may represent uncertainty in the respondents’ minds as to what inclusiveness might mean in a Special Collections context. 6 participants did not complete this question, more than any other in section B.
4.1.3 Section C: Who Uses Special Collections?

Section C of the questionnaire asked participants who they thought the Special Collections department is for use by. Figure 6 shows the results.

**Figure 6: Who Uses Special Collections?**

The majority of participants viewed the Special Collections department primarily for use by academic researchers. Participants were in agreement with personal researchers and undergraduate students using the department, though less so than academic researchers. The data shows that a significant number of participants were neutral over Special Collections use by commercial researchers, school / FE students, and the general public. Special Collections use by School / FE students, and the general public, gained the most statements of disagreement. No participants strongly disagreed with Special Collections being for use by any of the user groups. The majority of responses for all user groups ranged from neutral to strongly agree.
4.1.4 Section D: What is Special Collections Used For?

Section D asked participants what they thought the Special Collections department is used for. Figure 7 shows the results.

Figure 7: What is Special Collections Used For?

The majority of survey participants viewed the Special Collections department to be primarily used for arts and humanities research. Respondents were more neutral than in agreement about Special Collections use for science, engineering and mathematics research; this category also gained the most statements of disagreement. The remaining categories ranged largely between neutral and strongly agree.

The question provided respondents with the opportunity to add uses of Special Collections not listed on the questionnaire. Two respondents did so. One added ‘Publications, Theatre performances’, ranking this with ‘strongly agree’. The other added ‘Research for literary interests, plays, books’, ranking this with ‘strongly agree’.
4.1.5 Section E: Experience of Using Special Collections

Section E surveyed participants’ experiences of using Special Collections. The results are shown in figure 8.

**Figure 8: User Experience of Special Collections**

Most respondents were in agreement with each of the five statements. However, there is noticeably less certainty about the final two: awareness of the range of materials at the department, and the tools available to search collections.

Approximately a third of participants were either neutral towards or in disagreement with these statements, with the remaining two thirds in agreement.
4.1.6 Section F: Future Use of Special Collections

Section F asked participants what they would visit Special Collections for in the future. Figure 9 shows the results.

Figure 9: Future Use of Special Collections

The majority of participants saw work / study as the principal reason they would return to Special Collections. Responses for the remaining three categories ranged quite evenly between neutral, agreement and strong agreement. Leisure/personal interest received the most responses in disagreement, from 12 of the participants. Overall, however, few participants were in disagreement with any of the categories.

This question provided participants with the opportunity to add extra reasons for future visits, not already listed on the form. Only one participant did so, adding “research, re. book”, and ranking this with ‘strongly agree’.
4.1.7 Section G: Service Priorities - Customer service

Sections G to J of the questionnaire asked participants how important they considered different aspects of the Special Collections service to be. Section G asked users about customer service, referring specifically to interactions with Special Collections staff. The results for section G are displayed in figure 10.

Figure 10: Service Priorities for Customer Service

The results show that while all the stated aspects are considered important, participants viewed customer service provision by telephone and email to be less important than other aspects.
Section H asked participants about the Special Collections environment. The results are shown in figure 11.

**Figure 11: Service Priorities for the Special Collections Environment**

The results for this section show the participants viewed all listed aspects of the Special Collections environment to be an important part of service provision. Maintaining a quiet study area was shown to be of particular importance.
Section I: Service Priorities for Information Resources

Section I asked participants about their priorities regarding information resources at Special Collections. The results are shown in figure 12.

Figure 12: Service Priorities for Information Resources

In response to this question, participants found most aspects to be of importance; in particular access to materials, and finding aids. However, users were less sure about teaching sessions based on the collections. Approximately a third of respondents to this category were either neutral or in did not think it to be important, with the remaining two thirds thinking it to be important or very important. Participants did not tend to view the use of online tools such as blogs and twitter to be of particular importance in Special Collections service provision. Approximately two thirds of participants were either neutral or did not think this aspect to be of importance; the remaining third thinking it to be either important, or very important.
4.1.10 Section J: Service Priorities – Departmental Aims

Section J surveys participants’ opinions regarding the departmental aims of Special Collections. The results are shown in figure 13.

**Figure 13: Service Priorities for Departmental Aims**

The results show that respondents viewed preservation and management of collections as the most important operational consideration for the Special Collections department. Acquiring new material, and promoting the collections, were also recognised as important aims. Assisting the broader aims of the University, and engaging with the local community, received more mixed responses by comparison; however the majority of responses for these categories still regarded them as either important or very important.
4.1.11 Section K: Finding Out About Special Collections

Section K asks participants how they discovered Special Collections at the University of Leeds. From a list of options, participants were asked to tick all that apply. The results are shown in figure 14.

Figure 14: Finding Out About Special Collections

Responses to this question show that the Library / Special Collections website is the most common way of finding out about the department. Web searches, and recommendations from tutors and fellow students are also common ways to discover Special Collections. The remaining categories were selected by participants less frequently.
There was also the opportunity for participants to state any methods / reasons not listed on the questionnaire. Six participants did so, as follows:

- Former lecturer at the University of Leeds
- Other academic work
- Dissertation
- Ripon Historical Society website
- Recommendation by other institution (Thackary Museum)
- Copac

4.2 Summary of Qualitative Results

Of the 100 returned surveys, 80 included written responses to one or more of the 6 questions which form the second, qualitative part of the questionnaire. The majority of this feedback, approximately 71% of responses, consisted of brief statements in which the question was responded to in a few words. The remaining 29% of questions were answered in full sentences, giving more detail and depth of reflection.

The brevity of most comments, and the depth of others, mean that the comments in this second part of the questionnaire are suitable for both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The questions were as follows:

1. Have you experienced any worries or concerns about using Special Collections? If so, please describe.
2. Have you encountered any barriers during your use of Special Collections? If so, please describe.
3. What are your thoughts about Special Collections with regards to the physical environment?
4. What are your thoughts about Special Collections with regards to the service provided?
5. What do you like and/or dislike about Special Collections?
6. What do you think could be changed?
In order to gain an overview of the comments made, written feedback was coded via the following categories: positive experience or reflection (which comprised 75% of the total number of coded comments), negative experience or reflection (15%), and desired improvement (10%). Some comments incorporated both a negative experience and a desired improvement, and so were assigned both codes.

Questions 1 and 2 in this part of the questionnaire were designed to gather feedback on any barriers, psychological and practical, experienced by Special Collections users. However, participants also used other questions to highlight issues. Given that negative experiences/critical comments were relatively few, and spread across different questions, these will be analysed thematically, drawing upon the answers from different questions in order to investigate barriers to use of Special Collections.

The analysis will then look at questions 3 and 4, which received high amounts of positive feedback, to examine the kinds of comments that were made. It will then conclude by addressing recommendations given by participants, most of which were provided in response to question 6, but some of which also arose elsewhere in the qualitative part of the form.

4.2.1 Analysis of comments: Barriers to Use of Special Collections

Questions 1 asked participants if they had experienced any worries or concerns about using Special Collections. The majority of users did not report problems, with only 7 participants raising an issue. Question 2 asked participants if they had experienced any barriers during their use of Special Collections, to which 17 issues were raised. Comments in response to subsequent questions also described experiences/issues that could be termed barriers. However, from all the participants, only 20 responses to questions 3-6 described such problems. The open questions support the data collected in section B, and reflect that most users did not encounter barriers during their visit to Special Collections.

Issues raised with regards to barriers are listed as follows:
4.2.1.1 Finding Special Collections

Three participants raised concerns about finding the department. In response to question 2, one respondent stated they had not encountered any barriers personally, though followed on to say “I should imagine for anyone who doesn’t know their way round the university, or is new to using libraries or archives it would be hard to find & navigate.” In response to question 5, a participant stated that Special Collections “can be intimidating to locate for users who are not university members.” Answering question 5, a participant states that Special Collections is “a bit hidden away.” The same participant, in question 6, recommends that Special Collections employs, “more obvious placement of signs for visitors or people who are unfamiliar with it.”

4.2.1.2 Accessing Special Collections

One respondent states that they are “not keen” on the buzzer entry system. Another says that it would be nice not to have to ring a doorbell to gain entry. A different participant reported that the registration procedure to enter the library was “confusing”. Six participants requested longer opening hours; one specifically mentioning later evening opening, another extended weekend opening times.

4.2.1.3 Reading Room Procedures

A participant articulated a number of issues commonly considered problematic for Special Collections. In answering questions 1 and 5, the user mentions the “faff” of being required to leave personal possessions in the reception area, wait for items, and use only pencils (which is described as “irritating”). However, the user also recognises that “there are valid reasons for all these things” and that “preserving the collections is more important.” Another participant notes the three item limit as a dislike in responding to question 5 (users are only allowed to view three items at a time in the reading room). A University of Leeds undergraduate replied to question 2 by stating, “sometimes find it difficult to remember how to request an item – takes a
bit of getting used to at first.” Two participants noted the relative difficulty of obtaining photocopies from Special Collections material.

4.2.1.4. Information Tools

One participant noted initial difficulty in using the library’s online catalogue. A number of respondents reported issues with finding aids for particular collections held at the Special Collections department. One respondent highlighted the Romany Collections catalogue, another the Icelandic Collection Catalogue, neither of which are available electronically, only in printed form. Two respondents stated problems with the Liddle WW1/WW2 Collection electronic catalogue, finding it difficult to use. Listings for the Arthur Ransome Collection were found by one user to be confusing, while another user found the lack of a catalogue specifically for the Cookery Collection problematic.

4.2.1.5. Collection Use

Responding to question 1, a participant noted they were “unsure as to whether the general public is allowed to use the archives or whether you need to be with a research group.” In another reply to question 1, a different participant stated, “I do feel nervous about asking whether collections can be used beyond personal research and wouldn’t be certain who to ask.” Another respondent stated, in reply to question 6, that they would like “more of an introduction; when you haven’t been before it can be quite daunting.” In response to question 2, a participant noted that some material is “too old to access”, which likely refers to materials unavailable due to conservation concerns.

4.2.1.6. Awareness and Outreach

Four participants, all of whom are University of Leeds undergraduate students, indicated in question 6 that a lack of awareness about Special Collections was an
issue. One participant states, “As a first year student I was given little information about Special Collections”, and recommends making Special Collections “more heard about”, including how to use it. Another student replies to the question similarly, “I wish there had been greater emphasis on Special Collection procedure right from 1st year. Have only really heard about it since 3rd year of study – which for an English degree student is a real shame. Perhaps ingrain procedures of Special Collections into 1st year modules so that usage becomes a natural part of university study?” A third student replies to the question by recommending “awareness.” A fourth student states “Had I not been recommended the Special Collections area by a tutor it is unlikely that I would know about all of the material that is available here”, and recommends “more promotion/publishing of the collections.”

Another participant, a University of Leeds postgraduate student, replied to question 6 by recommending “more information about it [Special Collections] i.e. not just for students.”

4.2.2 Analysis of Comments: Question 3

Question 3 asked participants for their thoughts with regards to the physical environment of Special Collections, with 73 providing feedback. The majority of comments, 83%, were positive. Figure 15 displays a word cloud showing the frequency of different types of positive comment for this question.
The most commonly occurring positive comment was that Special Collections reading room was quiet. This confirms the results found in section H of the quantitative part of the questionnaire, that a quiet environment is important for Special Collections users.

In response to question 3, 13 participants stated that Special Collections provided an environment that was particularly conducive to work and study.

4.2.2.1 Issues Raised

Seven participants noted that the reading room was cold. Six of these arrived from participants during the first survey period, conducted during the summer months of 2013. They reflect an ongoing problem with the air conditioning system, which is not controlled by the Special Collections department.

Five participants noted a relative lack of plug sockets, and/or requested more power outlets at table height. The sockets currently available are underneath the tables used by visitors in the reading room.

One participant requested the provision of lockers to store personal belongings. Another participant noted that the Special Collections environment was so quiet that one “could be afraid to speak.” However, the reading room is a silent study area, and
the maintenance of quiet would generally be seen as positive by Special Collections staff.

4.2.3 Analysis of Comments: Question 4

Question 4 asked participants for their thoughts with regards to the customer service provided at Special Collections. Responses indicated a high standard of customer service at the department. Of the 80 participants who completed some or all of the later, qualitative part of the form, 75 took the opportunity to comment on customer service at the department. 93% of these comments were positive. Figure 16 displays a word cloud showing the frequency of different types of positive comment for this question.

Figure 16: Positive Comments about Customer Service at Special Collections

![Word cloud showing positive comments](image)

The most frequently occurring comment was that staff members were helpful.

4.2.3.1 Issues Raised

Five participants encountered problems with the department’s email service; specifically a delay between sending their enquiry and receiving a reply.
One participant experienced difficulty regarding copyright procedures. “I have received contradictory information and advice regarding copyright issues which caused much confusion.”

A participant stated that the service was “great”, but continued, “Need to be more welcoming to younger people (more consistent etc) if you are going to attract and keep those of school age.”

4.2.4 Participant Recommendations

Of the 80 participants who completed some or all of the later part of the form, 45 responded to question six. Approximately a third of these comments were to say that nothing should, or needed to be changed.

Recommendations for greater publicity, and better signage, have been mentioned earlier in the analysis.

Five respondents to question 6 stated opening hours as something that could be changed.

Four respondents requested greater availability of digitised materials, though one demonstrated awareness that “costs would be high.”

Four respondents expressed a desire for an improved electronic catalogue / searching resource. One would like materials to be linked together by keyword, stating, “I’m looking at medical texts and I’m sure I miss lots because there is no mention of keywords in the titles – so link them together!” Another respondent requested an updated Liddle WW1/WW2 catalogue. One participant would’ve liked a more user-friendly catalogue, and another would like it to display more details and images; however this participant also states that they would prefer the money to be spent on more stock.

One respondent noted a buzzing light fitting above their table.
One respondent was curious about a particular collections item, requesting information about a gilded wooden box stored near the reading room area.

One respondent found the campus map to be confusing, and not user-friendly, in having a small font-size. They request a simpler, clearer map that could easily be printed on a single page. (The campus maps available provided via the University of Leeds website, and are not produced by the Special Collections department).

One respondent would like to be able to take water into the reading room. It should be noted that their visit occurred, during the first data collection period, on a warm summer’s day; the user also stated in response to question 3 that the department is “very cool in summer.”

One respondent requested more prompt replies to emails, and another stated photocopying as an area for improvement; issues mentioned previously in the analysis.

One respondent stated that if more undergraduates were to use Special Collections, more space may be necessary.
5. Discussion

5.1 Use of Special Collections at the University of Leeds

In discussing user experience at Special Collections, it is useful to note certain general tendencies. During the academic years 2008/9 to 2012/3, each year, between 1200 and 1400 individuals visited Special Collections. Per year, the average number of visits (as opposed to visitors) was 2447. While this data would provide an average of two visits per user per year, some users make numerous visits to the department, returning each day for weeks at a time. The software currently used by the department to log user visits makes it difficult to extract data about how many visits individuals make over time. To gather more information, the researcher investigated records created during a sample period, October – December 2012. This period was chosen as it is usually one of the busiest times of year for the department (as demonstrated in Appendix 5). Of the new users registered during October – December 2012, the majority (63%) only made a single visit to the department. 31% made at least one return visit during the same academic year, while only 6% made at least one return visit in a subsequent academic year (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: Visits Made by New Users Registered between October and December 2012
In section A of the questionnaire, participants were asked how often they visited Special Collections, the results of which were shown in figure 3. Putting the available data together can provide an overview of Special Collections use. The majority of Special Collections users are likely to make a single visit the department, or two visits within the same academic year, not returning thereafter. Most users who arrive at Special Collections in a given academic year, therefore, are new to the department. Users who make multiple visits, and/or make use of the department over a number of years, represent a minority.

This data is significant in regard to the professional discourse examined in the literature review. Traister (2000) and others have identified problematic tendencies within Special Collections departments, in failing to appeal to, and accommodate, users who are not established researchers or academics; including undergraduates and visitors from outside higher education. New undergraduates and private users represent the majority of visitors to Special Collections at the University of Leeds.

It should be noted however that different users require very different levels of staff work, and prompt different levels of engagement. While undergraduates may present the most requests to Special Collections staff at Leeds, these may often be straightforward. By contrast, postgraduate and academic researchers, conducting in-depth research via a particular archive, may require greater assistance during a longer visit. To establish this further would be a research question unto itself; however, it is important to note that the service provision of Special Collections at the University of Leeds must clearly accommodate new users, both from within and outside the university, alongside maintaining longer-term and mutually beneficial relationships with academics and other researchers.

5.2 Customer Service and Barriers to Use

The survey results indicate that most participants did not experience barriers to their use of Special Collections. A statistical minority did encounter such issues as raised in the literature, but these issues did not result in a negative impression of the department or service as a whole.
The participant who most clearly articulated annoyance at the procedures and requirements of Special Collections, also stated that “preserving the collections is more important” than providing greater convenience. A different participant commended the department on the care with which items are handled, demonstrating an awareness of conservation needs. Concerns have been raised in the literature, by Traister (2000) for example, about the ways in which procedures based on collection care can impede upon user experience. However, the survey responses indicate that some users appreciate of the importance of the collection care and the associated procedures.

These results mirror findings by Harris (2008). In a survey of Special Collections and University Archive users at The University of Illinois at Chicago, Harris discovered that survey participants were generally happy working at the Special Collections department, and complying with the associated policies and procedures. However, in the conclusion to her report, having considered remarks from Traister (2003) about general shortcomings in Special Collections service provision, Harris writes,

“Perhaps Special Collections librarians have not made enough progress in achieving the levels of service and access that users desire. Not only must special collections librarians provide user-centered services and increase access, but they also must improve customer service skills to create a truly welcoming research environment.”

The results from the present research show that Special Collections at the University of Leeds has succeeded in creating a welcoming research environment. Participants congratulated staff on their helpfulness, demonstrating the importance of the relationship between users and staff members in enabling access to materials. For example, one participant writes, “I’m very impressed at how accommodating, helpful and friendly the staff have been, all my queries and requests have been dealt with excellently.” Another participant comments, “I had many mundane, obvious questions which the staff very effectively helped me with. They were very approachable, friendly and patient.”
These results show that effective customer service can reduce the impact of challenges and difficulties that may arise for Special Collections users. While departmental procedures necessarily provide some level of inconvenience, responsive and accommodating service can significantly reduce the extent to which use of Special Collections is experienced as involving a series of obstacles or difficulties.

The survey results also show the importance of applying a user-friendly outlook throughout a customer’s engagement with Special Collections. Some participants noted problems with the email service, while others had difficulty using the online catalogue and other searching aids. The department at Leeds has recently been addressing both of these issues, by utilising email enquiry management software, and working towards a new search system and interface via the departmental website. However these participants’ responses demonstrate the importance of recognising the different ways in which users interact with the department, and seeking to ensure a user-friendly experience from the first point of contact until the last. For example, a consideration of the customer ‘journey’, such as the mapping process employed by Andrews and Eade (2013) at Birmingham City University Library, could prove useful for Special Collections.

Taking into account the fact that most visitors to Special Collections will be new users, the fact that some participants expressed issues in finding the department may need to be addressed.

5.3 Undergraduate Users

Undergraduate participants raised particular issues in the survey. One undergraduate noted difficulty in remembering how to request items. Another requested “more of an introduction” as “when you haven’t been before it can be quite daunting.” Some undergraduate participants expressed regret that they had not discovered the department earlier in their studies, and recommended greater efforts in publicising Special Collections. One participant, an undergraduate student of English at the
University of Leeds, recommended integrating use of Special Collections into first year modules, so that it becomes “a natural part of university study”.

The question of how to engage undergraduate students may not be straightforward. Harris (2008) discovered a lack of interest in workshops and online tutorials among undergraduate students in her survey of Special Collections users. Engagement with undergraduate students is raised as a key area of Special Collections development in the literature, by Krausse (2010) and Torre (2008) among others. In their recent book, Past or Portal? Enhancing Undergraduate Learning through Special Collections and Archives, Mitchell, Seiden and Taraba (2012) present a wide range of case studies, examining the different ways Special Collections can contribute to undergraduate learning. The present survey results indicate that further means of engaging with undergraduate students, and raising awareness of Special Collections, could be usefully considered at the University of Leeds.

5.4 Outreach and New Audiences

Encouraging use of Special Collections by users beyond the academic institution is raised in the literature by Sommer (2012) and Cullingford (2011) for example. According to visitor figures for the past five academic years, private users, and those from non-Higher Education institutions, together make up 19% of the overall Special Collections user-base. Survey results raised certain issues for users from outside the academic context. One participant from a non-Higher Education institution stated they were “unsure as to whether the general public is allowed to use the archives or whether you need to be with a research group.” Another participant, also from a non-Higher Education institution, wrote, “I do feel nervous about asking whether collections can be used beyond personal research and wouldn’t be certain who to ask.”

Sections C and D in the qualitative part of the questionnaire asked participants about their perceptions of the Special Collections department, in terms of how and why it is used. The results indicated that most users view Special Collections as a place primarily for academic researchers in the arts and humanities to conduct their work.
In response to section F, participants identified work / study as the most likely reason for future visits to Special Collections. These results are unsurprising, given the location of the department and its role within an academic institution.

However, the results demonstrated a potential for developing new audiences for Special Collections. While events, exhibitions and leisure/personal interest were not identified as the most likely reasons to return to Special Collections, neither did they receive high levels of ‘disagreement’ on the 5-point-scale. Beckett (2013) describes successful work undertaken at the University of Manchester to develop public events and engage new audiences. Special Collections at the University of Leeds may have the opportunity to establish a greater public presence, should current plans to develop a new permanent gallery for Special Collections materials at the University of Leeds be successful.

Special Collections is open to the public and users from non-academic institutions, assisting these users in a variety of ways, corresponding to their varying needs and requirements, projects and interests. To develop this audience further, Special Collections staff may need to bear in mind survey results which show users outside the academic context may be uncertain about if and how they can use Special Collections, since it is primarily associated with academic use.

5.5 Issues Raised

Within the survey, a number of issues that were raised corresponded to general professional experience. Special Collections users would prefer longer opening hours, more content to be digitised, and enhanced catalogue entries; these findings mirror those of research conducted by Dooley et al. (2013) and Harris (2008). These aspirations are not achievable without increased resources. Participants also requested greater ease with which to obtain photocopies, however, the necessity of maintaining conservation practice means this is difficult to change.

Other issues raised in the survey were specific to Special Collections at the University of Leeds. A recurring problem with the air conditioning system led some
participants to note that the reading room was cold. Numerous participants commented on the provision of plug sockets, as they are somewhat difficult to access, being under desks rather than at table height. These are issues the department may wish to address.

A number of participants raised issues regarding information resources, such as catalogues and handlists. The Special Collections department at Leeds is in the process of updating its catalogue resources to provide a means of searching all the collections from a single search page. Feedback from participants indicated that users would like enhanced catalogue resources within their particular subject area; however, such provision would require considerable work and resources.

5.6 Social Media

Of the 100 survey participants, only 5 stated they had subscribed to the Special Collections twitter feed. In section I, updating users via social media such as blogs and twitter was not seen by users to be an important aspect of service. The researcher is aware that the Special Collections department has worked consistently to produce new twitter content; however staff may need to review how the account is marketed to users, and what the desired outcomes might be in terms of user subscription.

5.7 Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided in response to issues raised in the survey. While most relevant to Special Collections at the University of Leeds, they may also be of significance to the aims and objectives of similar departments elsewhere.

- Conduct further work with tutors from arts and humanities courses to engage undergraduate students in the use of Special Collections material.
- Hold regular open induction sessions both for university members and the general public.
- Document public engagement events and work which is undertaken with institutions and organisations outside the university. Display this documentation on the Special Collections website, to help develop the public profile of the department.
- Create a short information booklet which gives an overview of Special Collections, to hand out to new users. Taking into account the results from section K, the most common user journey involves finding an item on the library catalogue that is located in Special Collections, going to view the item in the department, concluding the visit and then not returning. Users, in this way, may never learn about the scope of the collections or the possibilities for research.
- Improve signage to the department within the building.
- Consider the objectives for use of social media.
6. Conclusions

6.1 Summary of Findings

The research found that most of the survey participants did not report problems or barriers in their use of Special Collections at the University of Leeds. However, responses highlighted the importance of customer service in helping to achieve this. Accommodating staff were aware of the difficulties that users might encounter, and able to respond effectively.

Certain feedback corresponded to issues which are common across the sector, such as the desire for longer opening hours, more digitised material, and enhanced catalogue records. Other feedback highlighted issues specific to the department at the University of Leeds, such as occasional lack of response to emails, problematic handlists for particular collections, the need for more plug sockets in the reading room, and difficulty in locating the department. The research shows how the process of acquiring user feedback can be a valuable one for Special Collections, helping staff to identify both problems and achievements.

The research found that more could be done to familiarise undergraduate students with Special Collections, and to help them feel comfortable in an environment that some may encounter as daunting, with unfamiliar rules and procedures. New undergraduate students are the most frequent visitors to Special Collections in a given academic year, so service provision and induction sessions may need to address their particular needs in more depth.

The survey found that participants were not opposed to the idea of visiting Special Collections for reasons other than academic research, such as events, exhibitions and leisure/personal interest. However, participants nevertheless regarded work/study as the most likely reason for a future visit. Participants considered Special Collections primarily to be a place for academic research, which is not surprising given its location and institutional function. To engage wider audiences, staff may need to keep in mind that members of the public, and potential users outside of higher education, may be uncertain if and how they are able to use Special Collections.
The research highlights the potential for user survey data to provide a basis for decision making and service priorities. For example, only 5 of the 100 participants subscribed to the Special Collections twitter feed, and participants did not consider use of social media, as a means of updating users, to be a service priority. Therefore, the department may wish to re-consider how it promotes its social media output, or what its objectives are with regards to online marketing.

6.2 Limitations

The research investigated the experiences and perceptions of Special Collections users. However, the views of university staff and students who have not visited the department would also be useful in establishing what is known about and thought about Special Collections within the institution. In arriving at the department and consulting items, survey participants had already overcome certain potential barriers to use, involving worries, concerns, and perceptions. Research which included the views of university members who hadn’t visited the department could provide more comprehensive results.

The survey was intended to allow a sizable number of participants to reflect on the service provided by Special Collections. A more in-depth understanding of certain user’s experiences and perceptions could be obtained via interview. The majority of written feedback provided in the present survey consisted of brief statements, however, some participants wrote at more length, and their comments could have been usefully explored further in an interview.

6.3. Aims and Objectives

The overall aim for the research was to investigate users’ perceptions and experiences of Special Collections, exploring barriers to use, and the potential for broader usage including events, exhibitions and general interest visits. The objectives
were:

1) To survey Special Collections users, investigating how they perceive, value and experience the service provided, identifying strengths and weaknesses.

2) To establish the extent to which visitors to Special Collections experience barriers to use, both psychological and practical, as discussed in the literature, and to examine any effect they have.

3) To investigate the potential for broader use of Special Collections, including exhibitions and general interest.

4) To identify service priorities based on user feedback.

The survey was successful in presenting an overview of user experience at Special Collections, and in doing so was able to address all four objectives. However, a survey designed solely to focus on customer satisfaction could have done so in more depth, for example, by asking additional and more specific questions about different aspects of service provision; or considering the experience of particular user groups in more detail. Likewise, a separate survey could have focussed exclusively on the issues of developing new audiences and programmes of exhibitions and events.

Questions in the qualitative section of the questionnaire focused on the issue of barriers to use, and general service provision, without enquiring about exhibitions and events specifically.

The qualitative section of the questionnaire was useful in gathering information about the problems and issues encountered by Special Collections users. It provided information about what they would like to see developed, or changed. The survey successfully investigated issue of barriers to use, within the experience of participants who had visited Special Collections. However, research about barriers could also usefully include participants who were aware of, but had not visited the department.
6.4 Areas for Further Study

User studies in Special Collections and archives have not previously been common, with the available literature presently limited. Further investigations upon similar lines to this research, developing the efficacy of survey tools and methods, would add to the work undertaken by Dupont and Yakel (2010) and Yakel and Tibbo (2010) for example, in what is currently a narrow field of investigation.

A survey of university staff and students, including those who have not visited the Special Collections department in person, could provide further means of examining perceptions of Special Collections and potential barriers to use.

As undergraduate students are the main user-group of Special Collections, research focussed on their needs and experiences, perhaps involving interviews with particular students or tutor groups, could highlight aspects of service that require greater consideration. Similarly, research focussed on Special Collections visitors from outside higher education could provide more information on how to assist and develop this user-group.

The potential for service evaluation in Special Collections and archives, as identified by the Archival Metrics project (Archival Metrics, 2014), is that it can not only provide an evidence base for decision making within a department, but that standardised survey methods could provide a means of comparing the work undertaken at different institutions, thereby enabling staff to develop best practice. Further research could implement a standardised Special Collections survey at a range of institutions, to examine how well such a tool might perform.

Word count: 14900
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8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Special Collections User Survey Version 1

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS USER SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The answers you provide will form the basis of an MA research project, currently being undertaken at the University of Sheffield. All responses are anonymous and confidential. If you would like further information, please ask a member of staff, or email s.clatworthy@leeds.ac.uk

The questionnaire will present a series of statements about the use of Special Collections. There will then be a feedback section in which you can add further comments. When complete, please fold the questionnaire, and place it in the black box situated on the central desk in the Special Collections reception area.

### Please tick to indicate your status

Undergraduate
Postgraduate
Academic
Non-HE institution
Private
University of Leeds Staff
Other (please state below)

### How often do you visit Special Collections in person? Please tick one option.

Several times a month (frequently)
Several times a year (regularly)
Once a year or less (infrequently)

### How often do you visit the Special Collections website? Please tick one option.

Several times a month (frequently)
Several times a year (regularly)
Once a year or less (infrequently)

### Are you a past or present member of the University of Leeds?

Yes
No

### Do you subscribe to the Special Collections Twitter Feed?

Yes
No

### The Special Collections department is:

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<tr>
<td>The general public</td>
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### The Special Collections department is used for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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### At Special Collections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>I am aware of the tools available to search the collections</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### In the future, I would visit Special Collections for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work / Study</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Exhibitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please state below)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### As part of the service provided by Special Collections, please rate the importance of the following aspects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Of some importance</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work / Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please state below)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Customer Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timely service at the reception desk/in the reading room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming and approachable staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective response to enquiries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing customer service remotely by telephone and email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing a quiet place to study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a pleasant environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a safe environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Information Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing access to material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing searching aids (e.g. catalogues and databases available online, handlists and indexes available at the department)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a website for Special Collections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updating library users via online tools such as blogs and twitter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Assisting individual library users with their research</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting teaching sessions about the collections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Departmental Aims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preserving and managing the collections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring new material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging/promoting use of Special Collections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting the broader aims of the university</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging with the local community</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Please indicate ways you have learned about or encountered Special Collections. Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation of a tutor</th>
<th>Online via a web search engine (e.g. Google)</th>
<th>Posts and leaflets</th>
<th>Exhibitions and events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation of a colleague or fellow student</td>
<td>Via the Library/Special Collections website</td>
<td>Reference in a publication or broadcast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation of a friend or family member</td>
<td>Via Twitter or other social media</td>
<td>Other (please state below)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

75
Have you experienced any worries or concerns about using Special Collections? If so, please describe.

Have you encountered any barriers during your use of Special Collections? If so, please describe.

What are your thoughts about Special Collections with regards to:

A. The physical environment

B. The service provided

What do you like and/or dislike about Special Collections?
What do you think could be changed?

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Please fold the questionnaire and place it in the black box on the central table in the Special Collections reception area.
Appendix 2: Special Collections User Survey Version 2

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS USER SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The answers you provide will form the basis of an MA research project, currently being undertaken at the University of Sheffield. All responses are anonymous and confidential. If you would like further information, please ask a member of staff, or email s.clatworthy@leeds.ac.uk

The questionnaire will present a series of statements about the use of Special Collections. There will then be a feedback section in which you can add further comments. When complete, please fold the questionnaire, and place it in the black box situated on the central desk in the Special Collections reception area.

Please tick to indicate your status
Undergraduate
Postgraduate
Academic
Non-HE institution
Private
University of Leeds Staff
Other (please state below)

How often do you visit Special Collections in person? Please tick one option.
Several times a month (frequently)
Several times a year (regularly)
Once a year or less (infrequently)

How often do you visit the Special Collections website? Please tick one option.
Several times a month (frequently)
Several times a year (regularly)
Once a year or less (infrequently)

Are you a past or present member of the University of Leeds?
Yes
No

Do you subscribe to the Special Collections Twitter Feed?
Yes
No

The Special Collections department is:
Please tick a number on the scale from 1 to 5
1  2  3  4  5
Easy to find
Easy to access
Welcoming
Easy to use
Impressive
Inclusive
Appealing
Accommodating

Difficult to find
Difficult to access
Intimidating
Complicated
Ordinary
Exclusive
Unappealing
Restrictive

The Special Collections department is for use by:
Please tick to indicate whether you agree or disagree
Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree
Academic researchers
Commercial researchers
Personal researchers (e.g. family history)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate students</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School / further education students</td>
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### The Special Collections department is used for:

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### As part of the service provided by Special Collections, please rate the importance of the following aspects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Of some importance</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer Service</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>

| As part of the service provided by Special Collections, please rate the importance of the following aspects: | Very important | Important | Neutral | Of some importance | Not important |
| Environment |  |  |  |  |  |
| Providing a quiet place to study |  |  |  |  |  |
| Providing a pleasant environment |  |  |  |  |  |
| Providing a safe environment |  |  |  |  |  |

| Information Resources |  |  |  |  |  |
| Providing access to material |  |  |  |  |  |
| Providing searching aids (e.g. catalogues and databases available online, handlists and indexes available at the department) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Maintaining a website for Special Collections |  |  |  |  |  |
| Updating library users via online tools such as blogs and twitter |  |  |  |  |  |
| Assisting individual library users with their research |  |  |  |  |  |
| Conducting teaching sessions about the collections |  |  |  |  |  |

| Departmental Aims |  |  |  |  |  |
| Preserving and managing the collections |  |  |  |  |  |
| Acquiring new material |  |  |  |  |  |
| Encouraging / promoting use of Special Collections |  |  |  |  |  |
| Assisting the broader aims of the university |  |  |  |  |  |
| Engaging with the local community |  |  |  |  |  |

| Please indicate ways you have learned about or encountered Special Collections. Tick all that apply. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Recommendation of a tutor |  | Online via a web search engine (e.g. Google) |  | Posters and leaflets |  |
| Recommendation of a colleague or fellow student |  | Via the Library/Special Collections website |  | Reference in a publication or broadcast |  |
| Recommendation of a friend or family member |  | Via Twitter or other social media |  | Other (please state below) |  |
Have you experienced any worries or concerns about using Special Collections? If so, please describe.

Have you encountered any barriers during your use of Special Collections? If so, please describe.

What are your thoughts about Special Collections with regards to:

A. The physical environment

B. The service provided

What do you like and/or dislike about Special Collections?

What do you think could be changed?
Thank you for taking part in this survey. Please fold the questionnaire and place it in the black box on the central table in the Special Collections reception area.
Appendix 3: Research Ethics Proposal Application Form

The University of Sheffield.
Information School

Proposal for
Research Ethics Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This proposal submitted by:</td>
<td>This proposal is for:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>X Specific research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X Postgraduate (Taught) – PGT</td>
<td>Generic research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate (Research) – PGR</td>
<td>This project is funded by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Project Title: An Investigation Into User Perceptions of Special Collections
Start Date: 26/6/13          End Date: 24/7/13

Principal Investigator (PI): (student for supervised UG/PGT/PGR research)
Stephen Clatworthy
Email: stclatworthy1@sheffield.ac.uk

Indicate if the research: *(put an X in front of all that apply)*

- Involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness, or those unable to make a personal decision
- Involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)
- Involves children or young people aged under 18 years of age
- Involves highly sensitive topics such as ‘race’ or ethnicity; political opinion; religious, spiritual or other beliefs; physical or mental health conditions; sexuality; abuse (child, adult); nudity and the body; criminal activities; political asylum; conflict situations; and personal violence.

Please indicate by inserting an “X” in the left hand box that you are conversant with the University’s policy on the handling of human participants and their data.

We confirm that we 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

*Information School Research Committee – Research Ethics Application Form, version 1.1, 2012*
Part B. Summary of the Research

B1. Briefly summarise the project's aims and objectives:
(This must be in language comprehensible to a layperson and should take no more than one-half page. Provide enough information so that the reviewer can understand the intent of the research)

Summary:

The project aims to investigate particular issues surrounding the use of special collections departments in academic libraries. Literature in this area discusses how the nature of special collections departments, which are responsible for the care and preservation of rare and valuable materials, can present an environment that is intimidating to prospective users, or perceived as exclusive. One of the objectives of this research is to establish to what extent this may be true.

Other objectives include investigating aspects of special collections that users find most important, discovering how much they know about the activities of a special collections department, and investigating the potential for increased general recreational/public use of the collections.

Previous investigations into the services provided by special collections departments in academic libraries have looked into the views and experiences of library staff. This research aims to investigate the experience of using special collections from the library user's perspective.

The research will take place at the Special Collections department at the University of Leeds Library, providing a case study.

B2. Methodology:

Provide a broad overview of the methodology in no more than one-half page.

Overview of Methods:

Data will be collected via a written questionnaire. This will be handed to customers in the Special Collections reading room, along with their requested material, by a member of staff. If the customer wishes to participate in the survey, they will complete the form at their desk, and post it into a sealed box at reception on their departure. This box will be emptied at regular intervals by the researcher, and the questionnaires stored privately.

The questionnaire asks for opinions, but it will be completed anonymously. Personal data such as name, age or address will not be collected.

The questionnaire uses a mixed methods approach, collecting customer responses via quantitative and qualitative means. The data will be inputted into spreadsheets/documents for analysis.

If more than one method, e.g., survey, interview, etc. is used, please respond to the questions in Section C for each method. That is, if you are using both a survey and interviews, duplicate the page and answer the questions for each method; you need not duplicate the information, and may simply indicate, “see previous section.”
C1. Briefly describe how each method will be applied

Method (e.g., survey, interview, observation, experiment):

Written questionnaire.

Description – how will you apply the method?

Customers who visit Special Collections and request items to view in the reading room will be provided with a questionnaire and asked to complete it.

About your Participants

C2. Who will be potential participants?

All visitors to Special Collections, who are requesting reading material, will be invited to participate; with the exception of those under 18 years of age.

C3. How will the potential participants be identified and recruited?

Participants will be handed a questionnaire with their reading material.

C4. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

There is very low risk of physical/psychological harm or distress. If customers do not wish to complete the survey, they will be under no obligation to do so.

C5. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If Yes, please explain how informed consent will be obtained?

If No, please explain why you need to do this, and how the participants will be de-briefed?

Customers who complete the survey are thereby consenting to take part in the research. No separate form is required.

C6. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? N/A

About the Data

C7. What data will be collected? (Tick all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print</th>
<th>Digital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio recording</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video recording</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer logs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires/Surveys</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information School Research Committee – Research Ethics Application Form, version 1.1, 2012*
C8. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

Questionnaires will be completed anonymously, folded and posted into a sealed box in the Special Collections department by the participant upon their departure.

C9. How/Where will the data be stored?

The collection box will be emptied at regular intervals by the researcher. The questionnaires will be stored privately in a folder.

C10. Will the data be stored for future re-use? If so, please explain

N/A

About the Procedure

C11. 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)? If so, please explain how it will be managed.

Information School Research Committee – Research Ethics Application Form, version 1.1, 2012
Title of Research Project: An Investigation into User Perceptions of Special Collections

We confirm our responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Sheffield’s policies and procedures, which include the University’s ‘Financial Regulations’, ‘Good Research Practice Standards’ and the ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’ (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In submitting this research ethics application form I am also confirming that:

- The form is accurate to the best of our knowledge and belief.
- The project will abide by the University’s Ethics Policy.
- There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
- Subject to the research being approved, we undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
- We undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting our academic department’s Ethics Coordinator in the first instance).
- We are aware of our responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in GICS).
- We understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
- We understand that personal data about us as researchers in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (e.g. the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
- If this is an application for a ‘generic’ project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.
- We 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 the Student (if applicable):
Stephen Clatworthy

Name of Principal Investigator (or the Supervisor):
Alastair Allan

Date: 21.6.13
Appendix 4: Certificate of Approval

Information School Research Ethics Panel

Letter of Approval

Date: 2nd July 2013

TO: Stephen Clatworthy

The Information School Research Ethics Panel has examined the following application:

An Investigation into User Perceptions of Special Collections

Submitted by: Stephen Clatworthy

And found the proposed research involving human participants to be in accordance with the University of Sheffield’s policies and procedures, which include the University’s ‘Financial Regulations’, ‘Good Research Practice Standards’ and the ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’ (Ethics Policy).

This letter is the official record of ethics approval by the School, and should accompany any formal requests for evidence of research ethics approval.

Effective Date: 2nd July 2013

[Signature]

Dr Angela Lin
Research Ethics Coordinator
Appendix 5: Number of Visitors to Special Collections by Month;
During the Academic Years 2008/9 – 2012/13

Number of Visitors to Special Collections by Month
During the Academic Years 2008/9 - 2012/13

0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400 450
Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul

2012/13
2011/12
2010/11
2009/10
2008/09
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Name Stephen Clatworthy

Department Information School, MA Librarianship

Signed Stephen Clatworthy Date 30/08/13

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Name

Department

Signed

Date

THIS SHEET MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH DISSERTATIONS BY DEPARTMENTAL REQUIREMENTS.