

Nutting, Ryan; Morris, Jeni

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Museologica Brunensia. 2016, vol. 5, iss. 1, pp. 62-67

ISSN 1805-4722 (print); ISSN 2464-5362 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2016-1-6>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/135581>

Access Date: 29. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

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METHODICAL AND INFORMATIVE TEXTS

THE ORIGIN OF THE SCHOOL OF MUSEUM STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

DOI: 10.5817/MuB2016-1-6

RYAN NUTTING – JENI MORRIS

Developing the Idea

Now celebrating its fiftieth year, the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester began as a small academic department offering a graduate certificate in Museum Studies in the autumn of 1966. However, the department expanded dramatically; only three years after it opened it recruited more students, developed more classes, and started to gain the international reputation it holds today. Primarily utilising documents from the Jack Simmons Collection in the University of Leicester Special Collections, this paper will track the development of the department during the tenure of Jack Simmons, then a professor of history at the University of Leicester, from early discussions about establishing a museum studies department at the University of Leicester, to the opening of the department in 1966, through the spring of 1970 when Simmons left the department.

Documents held by Special Collections indicate that Jack Simmons began discussing the foundation of the department in the autumn of 1960. In his correspondence Simmons identified the need for training museum professionals. Simmons cited programmes that teach archival studies and library studies at universities in the United Kingdom, as well as conversations he held with museum directors in Leicester and Edinburgh, to

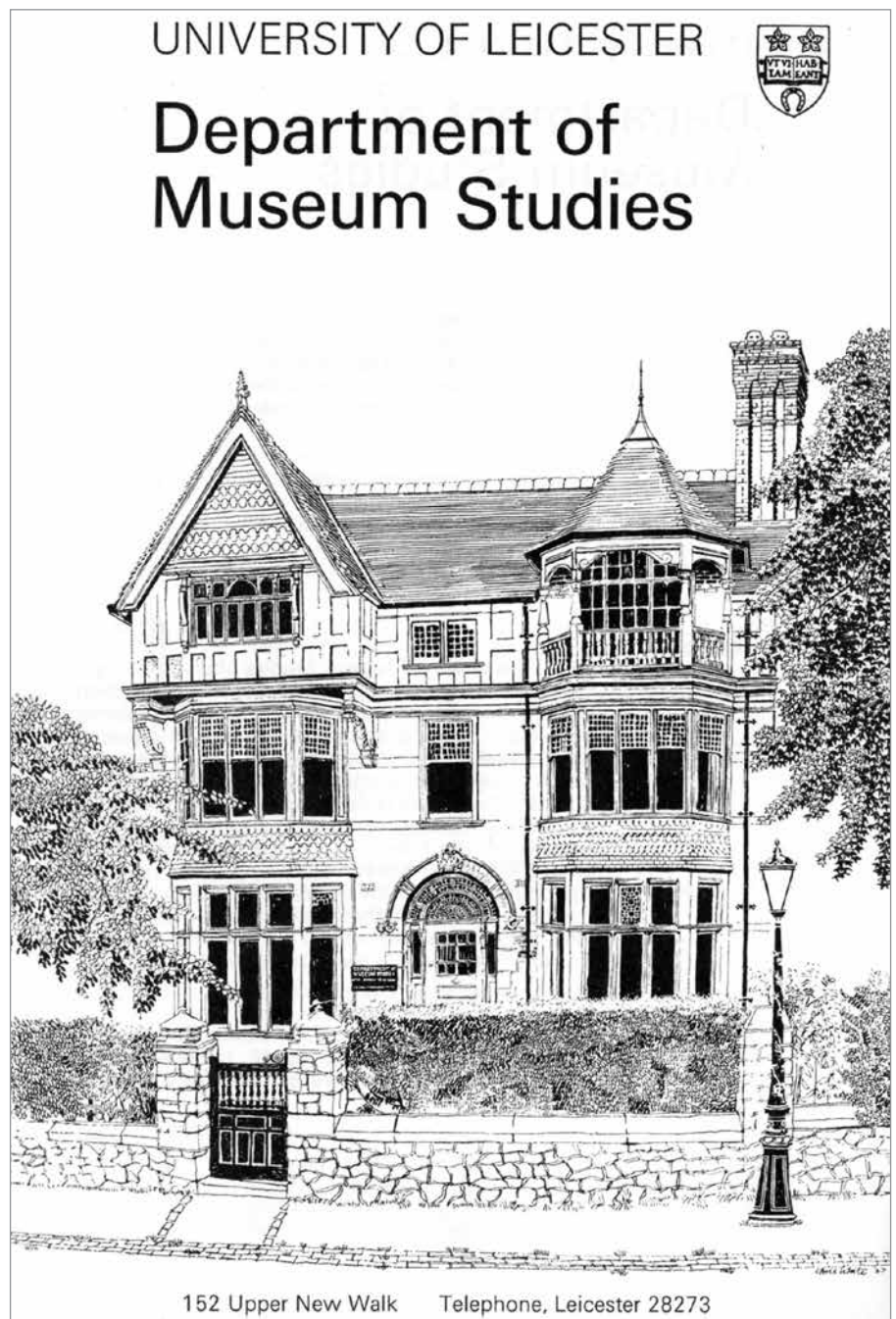


Figure 1: University of Leicester Department of Museum Studies brochure c. 1967. Jack Simmons Collection at the University of Leicester, ULA/D4/1/5 © University of Leicester.

argue that museum studies did not possess comparable training at a university level.¹ He added that Leicester would provide an ideal location for this course given the fact that Leicester City Museum was recognised as one of four museums in the country with an established training programme for museum professionals. He proposed partnering with Leicester Museums in the establishment of this course with the university retaining control of the programme.² He closed this letter by stressing how this proposed department would aid the training of museum professionals and would elevate the reputation of the University of Leicester since no training programmes of this kind existed at the time in Europe or the USA.³ He wrote, *“If it were rightly directed, it might well serve to give Leicester a very considerable reputation.”*⁴

The University agreed with Simmons and immediately began planning the development of the museum studies programme, first mentioning museum studies in its five year plan dated 5 May 1961 as “Lectureship in Museum Administration”.⁵ Simmons then began to research academic training departments in the United Kingdom and abroad. This research included meeting and corresponding with academic staff at the University of

Liverpool, the University of Exeter, museum professionals, including the Director of Leicester City Museum, and members of the Museums Association (MA) in the United Kingdom.⁶ Simmons’ research also included reviewing information on the museum training programme at the State University College at Oneonta and the New York State Historical Society in Cooperstown, New York. In a letter to C.M.L. Brooke at the University of Liverpool, dated 29 October 1963, Simmons stated that he would like to discuss this proposed museum studies training programme with him. Simmons envisioned the museum studies department at the University of Leicester running in a similar fashion to the diploma programme offered by the University of Liverpool in archival studies.⁷

After reviewing similar training programmes, the task then fell to Simmons and a group of museum professionals to develop the curriculum for the department including the cooperation and collaboration for the development of the course from the MA and from Leicester City Museum. In a report written on 21 October 1963, Simmons detailed a meeting he held with museum professionals and the Museums Association Education Committee including Trevor Walden, the Director of Leicester City Museum, a member of the Museums Association Education Committee, and the chairman of the University’s committee developing the museum studies programme. The report from this meeting stressed that for this course to succeed it would need to offer more than one subject to students. Based upon the advice Simmons received,

the report listed possible branches of the course as archaeology, fine art, geology, biology, industrial archaeology, folk life, or local history.⁸ Of these options Simmons recommended that the course offer archaeology and geology to the students as academic staff at the University of Leicester previously offered to help with these areas.⁹ However, the report also stressed that the syllabus for the course must offer three modules: academic work, instruction in the theory and practice of museum administration, and practical work in museums including sending students to gain experience in museums.¹⁰

Later meetings between the department and the MA also proved fruitful. Walden and Simmons already possessed a working relationship. Simmons sat on the Leicester Museums and Libraries Committee with Walden and both men knew of the educational programming offered by Leicester City Museum including their pioneering Schools Service Department, museum assistant internship opportunities, and numerous lectures and hands-on learning experiences. Walden also shared the syllabus for the MA diploma with Simmons and offered Simmons advice on funding the course. Furthermore, the MA and the Department of Museum Studies agreed that the department’s graduate certificate and the diploma offered by the MA would not compete with each other, but instead complement one another.

1 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, “Proposed Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Administration,” 18 November 1960.

2 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, “Proposed Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Administration,” 18 November 1960.

3 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, “Proposed Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Administration,” 18 November 1960.

4 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, “Proposed Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Administration,” 18 November 1960.

5 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, C. H. Wilson, “University of Leicester Development Board Report to the Senate on Quinquennial Anticipation,” 5 May 1961.

6 The MA, founded in 1889, is the professional museums association of the United Kingdom.

7 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, letter to C.M.L. Brooke, 29 October 1963.

8 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, “Proposed Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Administration,” 18 November 1960.

9 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, “Proposed Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Administration,” 18 November 1960.

10 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, “Proposed Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Administration,” 18 November 1960.



Figure 2: The University of Leicester School of Museum Studies in 2009 © Martine Hamilton Knight Photography

In the autumn of 1963 Simmons wrote that the University must find the right person to head this department. In his report dated 21 October 1963 he stated that the establishment of the department and its curriculum would depend on hiring the right person. He wrote, “*it would be essential that the person appointed should command respect within the museum profession and that his academic qualifications should make him acceptable to the University.*”¹¹ Simmons added this person would need to possess the qualifications of a museum director since the person’s role would include the roles of administrator, tutor, and lecturer.¹²

In early 1966, the University hired Ray Singleton, Walden’s recommendation, to fill this position. Singleton fitted Simmons’ description from 1963 almost perfectly. Prior to his hiring by the University he served as the Director

of Sheffield City Museum as well as Keeper of Geology at Nottingham Natural History Museum and Liverpool Museums, and worked as a science tutor in a public school.¹³ Additionally, Singleton possessed memberships of both the MA and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) including roles on both organisations’ education committees.¹⁴

The Leicester Course Begins

With Singleton in place, and the programme now referred to as “the Leicester Course”, the department prepared to open and admit its first students in 1966 for its graduate certificate in museum studies. In November 1965 the University of Leicester Admissions board limited the number of students in the initial class to twelve,¹⁵ and allowed for up

to fifteen visiting lecturers for the 1966-67 academic year.¹⁶ In March 1966 the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Science noted the opening of the department in their staff committee minutes and included the syllabus for the course.

The department’s first course guide centred on providing training in museum administration with optional courses in either archaeology or geology loosely based upon the Diploma offered by the MA. Additionally, the guide listed the requirements for admission to and graduation from the programme. It stated that students applying to the course must already hold a university degree and wish to pursue a career in the museum field. The course ran from October to the end of July, and required that students sit four written papers at the end of May and submit a dissertation of 5000–7000 words by the end of July on a topic related to the museum studies modules. Heralding the opening of the department, the full course guide appeared in *ICOM News* in February 1967.

Stressing Simmons’ and Singleton’s aim that the course provide vocational training, rather than focusing on academic work, the course required all students to take five modules on museum studies and complete practical work in museums in the United Kingdom. The first module included information on the history and purpose of museums, including different types of museums. Students also took modules on museum administration and organisation that included information on staffing and funding museums as well as information on professional museum organisations. Furthermore, the course included

¹¹ University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, “Proposed Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Administration,” 18 November 1960.

¹² University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, “Proposed Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Administration,” 18 November 1960.

¹³ University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Howard Raymond Singleton, “Howard Raymond Singleton.”

¹⁴ University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Howard Raymond Singleton, “Howard Raymond Singleton.”

¹⁵ University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “University of Leicester Admissions Board,” 8 November 1965.

¹⁶ University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “University of Leicester Establishment Board,” 8 June 1966.



Figure 3: The University of Leicester School of Museum Studies in 2009. © Martine Hamilton Knight Photography

During the 1966–67 academic year the department also hosted visiting lecturers who spoke on subjects including museum administration, museum security, types of museums, purposes of museums, and archaeological research.

Simmons and Singleton and the University took additional steps in order to emphasize the vocational aspect of the course. Singleton wrote that the department would rely on visiting lecturers, such as museum directors and curators rather than hire a permanent staff of lecturers.¹⁸ A brochure advertising the department only lists four staff members: Director Singleton, Lecturer Mr. G. Stansfield, Secretary Mrs. B. Lee and Technician Mr. J. McAlinden.¹⁹ Additionally, the University Senate established a board of seven people to administer this course, which included determining the course syllabus and content of the course examinations. The first board included the Director of Leicester City Museum and the Chairman of the Education Committee of the MA, Jack Simmons and academic staff from other University departments including zoology, archaeology, geology, and history of art.²⁰

The first class of museum studies consisted of nine students with a varied background. At the time of their admission all of the students already possessed a Bachelor's degree with eight holding a Bachelor of Arts and one possessing a Bachelor of

¹⁸ SINGLETON, Raymond. The Leicester Course. *Museums Journal*, 1966, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 137.

¹⁹ University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, "University of Leicester Department of Museum Studies."

²⁰ University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, "University of Leicester Board of Studies in Museum Studies," 7 October 1966.

a module on museum buildings and equipment. This section included information on furnishing, cleaning, lighting, and heating museums as well as information on museum security and insurance. The fourth module of the course emphasized collections and exhibitions including collections policies, using and displaying objects, and arranging, preserving, conserving, restoring, and repairing objects. The fifth of the taught modules, titled "Museum Activities", focused on dealing with the public, including how to handle enquiries, cooperating with local authorities and other institutions, temporary exhibitions, sales of museum publications, photographs, and reproductions as well as lectures, films, concerts, and other public functions. The final mandatory activity for all students included practical work both in and outside the department which the course guide described as "*relating to display techniques, storage, lighting, modelling, casting, etc., in addition to periods of attachment to national and provincial museums in the United*

Kingdom for instruction in museum administration and organisation."¹⁷

As mentioned above, and in keeping with its vocational focus, the course offered one of two speciality subjects to students in its first year: archaeology and geology. The archaeology section of the course focused on archaeological fieldwork, conservation, photographing, and modelling objects, organising an archaeological laboratory, dating archaeological objects, and information on national archaeology institutions and societies. Similarly, the geology section of the course centred on cataloguing, photographing, modelling, and conserving geological specimens and information on national societies and institutions focused on geology. However, unlike the archaeology section, this section also included information on cleaning and repairing objects, creating outdoor displays, organising a geological laboratory, and preparing maps.

¹⁷ University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, "University of Leicester Department of Museum Studies Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies."

Science.²¹ Three of the students held degrees in archaeology, while the remainder possessed degrees in English Studies, Classics, Combined Studies, Geography, Geology, and History.²² Simmons noted that none of the students possessed experience working in a museum and stated that both he and Singleton agreed the course should seek to attract museum professionals in the future.²³

The Course Continues to Grow

In a letter to the Vice-Chancellor dated 10 October 1966 Simmons outlines a vision for the future of the department that he shared with Singleton. They advocated that the course should offer more modules, expand the total number of students, and include both museum professionals and international students.²⁴ Between 1967 and 1970 the department began to expand dramatically around these ideas as it grew in terms of students enrolled on the programme, modules offered on the course, and cooperation with both national and international organisations. The department accepted more students per year starting with the 1967–68 academic year. The department received sixty applications for admittance to the course for the 1967–68 academic year and admitted twenty students comprising twelve women and eight men.²⁵ Of these twenty, the

department notes that seventeen came from a university and three from a museum.²⁶ Enrolment in the department continued to climb in the late 1960s as the department admitted twenty-three students in 1968 and twenty-nine in 1969 including three international students in 1968 and one international student in 1969.²⁷ A Department of Museum Studies brochure printed in the late 1960s highlighted the pioneering work done in the department. It stated that the department is “the first University Department to be founded in Western Europe for the purpose of training entrants to the museums profession.”²⁸

The modules the department offered also expanded during this period. The 1967–1968 University of Leicester student handbook noted that the department now offered optional modules in archaeology, local history, history of science, geology, and natural history.²⁹ Half of the students in 1967–68 registered for the new modules including six students enrolled on the local history module, three students on the natural history module and one on the history of science module.³⁰ The University of Leicester Prospectus for the 1969–70 academic year confirmed that the department still offered these modules two years later.³¹ During the spring term of 1969

visiting lecturers spoke on a variety of topics. These lectures included titles such as “Museum Lighting”, “Information Retrieval”, “Folk Museum”, “Museum Services for Schools”, and “Museums & the Public”.³²

Due to the professional connections of staff within the department, especially of Simmons, Singleton and Stansfield, the department began assisting local museums and societies and students gained additional practical experience in museums. Between 1967 and 1969 Leicester City Museum praised the work of many of the students in their museums. Additionally, Stansfield and six students spent two weeks at the Tankerness House Museum in Kirkwall setting up exhibitions and conducting conservation work on objects in the museum’s collection through funding from the Carnegie Trust. Kirkwall city officials and members of the department praised the students’ work in establishing this museum. Town Clerk Andrew R. Bushan wrote, “*the Museum, which is so long overdue, will without doubt be a valuable asset to the community.*”³³

During this period the department’s international reputation grew as well. In October 1967 Singleton attended the ICOM Colloquium on Museum Training in Brno, Czechoslovakia and took the role of Chair of the Working Party for the European Group of Museum Training Establishments. In April 1969 Singleton travelled to Argentina and Brazil and delivered seminars on the history and function of museums, museum educational programming, teaching

21 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “Students Admitted for the Graduate Certificate Course in Museum Studies.”

22 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “Students Admitted for the Graduate Certificate Course in Museum Studies.”

23 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, letter to the Vice-Chancellor, 10 October 1966.

24 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Jack Simmons, letter to the Vice-Chancellor, 10 October 1966.

25 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “Department of Museum Studies 1967/68.”

26 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “Department of Museum Studies 1967/68.”

27 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “Document A Department of Museum Studies Admissions.”

28 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “University of Leicester Department of Museum Studies.”

29 *University of Leicester Students’ Handbook 1967–68*. Leicester: University of Leicester, 1968, p. 92.

30 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “Department of Museum Studies 1967/68.”

31 *University of Leicester Prospectus 1969–70*. Leicester: University of Leicester, 1970, p. 81.

32 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “Document A Department of Museum Studies Visiting Lecturers Spring Term 1969.”

33 University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, Andrew R. Bushan, letter to Singleton, “Tankerness House Museum,” 25 April 1968.

museology, and delivering training to museum staff and museum studies students.³⁴ Additionally, both the MA and ICOM held a conference in Leicester in 1969. This year also saw the department receive funding from the Gulbenkian Foundation for museum scholars based outside the United Kingdom to study or teach in the department.

In the spring of 1970 Jack Simmons left the Department of Museum Studies due to ill health. However, he left the enduring legacy of the department he helped to establish and grow. Simmons began with an idea to train museum professionals at a university level. Documents held by the University of Leicester Special Collections demonstrate how he cultivated this idea and, in less than a decade, grew this idea into a department that offered five elective modules and developed a national and international reputation as a world leader in training museum studies students and professionals. Currently, the School possesses nearly 400 full time and part time MA and PhD students and holds conferences bringing together museum practitioners as well as museum studies instructors and students from around the world. In April 2016 the School will celebrate its fiftieth year with a conference titled “The Museum in the Global Contemporary: Debating the Museum of Now”.

RYAN NUTTING

School of Museum Studies,
University of Leicester, UK

JENI MORRIS

School of Museum Studies,
University of Leicester, UK

³⁴ University of Leicester Special Collections ULA/D4/1/5, Leicester, *Jack Simmons Collection*, “Document B Department of Museum Studies Director’s Visit to Chile, 18 March- 8 April 1969,” 13 May 1969.