

Historical Note

The University of Sheffield developed from three local institutions: the Sheffield School of Medicine, Firth College and the Sheffield Technical School. The School of Medicine, founded 1828, was by far the oldest. Its early history was very insecure and it was saved from collapse by the opening of Firth College, which took over the teaching of all basic science subjects to medical students.

Firth College was one of a group of university colleges founded in the later 19th century. It developed out of the Cambridge University Extension Movement, a scheme designed to bring university teaching to the large towns and cities of England, most of which lacked any university provision. The success of these courses in Sheffield led Mark Firth, a local steel manufacturer, to establish the College in 1879 as a centre for teaching Arts and Science subjects.

The Sheffield Technical School

The Sheffield Technical School was the product of local concern about the need for better technical training of the men responsible for running the great industries of Sheffield, particularly steelmaking. A movement was started within Firth College to collect funds to create a technical department, which was established in 1884 as the Sheffield Technical School. In 1886 the School moved to new premises on the site of the old Grammar School at St George's Square.

In 1897, the three institutions were amalgamated by Royal Charter to form the University College of Sheffield. This step was part of the plan to link up with the Victoria University, a federation of the University Colleges at Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds.

By 1900, however, the Federal University was disintegrating and within a few years independent universities were formed from the three University Colleges.

On 31 May 1905 the University of Sheffield was granted its Royal Charter, and in July the new Firth Court Building on Western Bank was opened by King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. St George's Square remained the centre of Applied Science departments, with Arts, Medicine and Science being housed at Western Bank.

The University in 1905

At the time of the University's foundation in 1905 there were 114 full-time students reading for degrees in Arts, Pure Science, Medicine and Applied Science. In 1919 when returning ex-servicemen were admitted in large numbers, the full-time student figure rose to a short-lived peak of about 1,000. By then the Faculty of Applied Science had split into Engineering and Metallurgy; the University's first Hall of Residence (the original Stephenson Hall) had been established; and the Edgar Allen library had opened (1909).

At that time the University was as committed to non-degree teaching as to teaching full-time students. Courses covered not only many conventional academic subjects but also topics as diverse as cow-keeping, railway economics, mining and razor-grinding. During the First World War some of these were replaced by teaching of (and participation in) munitions making, medical appliances design and production, translation and politics.

Between the two wars full-time student numbers stabilised at about 750 and expansion into new areas of specialist teaching and research continued slowly. The Second World War brought with it new areas of specialist research and training - in, for example, radar, dietary and vitamin studies, production of anaesthetics and chemicals (as substitutes for materials previously imported from Europe), magnetism, fuel production and economy, naval cartography, glass manufacture and English language teaching.

Since the Second World War

Since the Second World War, many older houses have been brought into academic use and major new buildings have been constructed - the Main Library in 1959, and the Arts Tower, Hicks Building, Alfred Denny Building, Sir Robert Hadfield Building, Chemical Engineering Building, University House, five Halls of Residence and the Union of Students in the 1960s.

New buildings for Geography and Psychology followed in the 1970s, along with the Crookesmoor Building (for Law and Management), the Royal Hallamshire Hospital, and purpose-built student flats. The next decade saw the opening of the Octagon Centre, the Sir Henry Stephenson Building (for engineering), and major extensions at the Northern General Hospital.

In the 1990s, new premises for the School of Clinical Dentistry, the Management School, the Division of Education, St George's Library (incorporating Blackwell's University Bookshop) and St George's Flats and Lecture Theatre were opened, together with extensions to Stephenson, Halifax, and Tupton Halls of Residence, and three new blocks of student flats.

The Regent Court building, which houses the Departments of Computer Science and Information Studies and the Sheffield Centre for Health and Related Research, were also completed. The Union of Students underwent a £5 million development programme, improving welfare, social and meetings facilities.

Following the University's integration with the Sheffield and North Trent College of Nursing and Midwifery in 1995, a building programme provided new facilities for nursing and midwifery teaching and research. This includes the extension and conversion of the St George's Hospital site on Winter Street, and the construction of a new building at the Northern General Hospital.

The 21st Century

The University's ambitious estates strategy has continued into the new millennium. Campus additions include the £80 million refurbishment programme for laboratories in the medical, biological and physical sciences:

- Custom-built University Health Centre
- The Sheffield Bioincubator
- Multidisciplinary Informatics Collaboratory for the Social Sciences

Other developments include:

- The inauguration of the £20 million North Campus (housing the Kroto Research Institute and the Nanoscience and Technology Centre).
- The construction of a £24 million library building (known as the Information Commons).
- Commencement of a £160 million building programme to redevelop residential accommodation on the Endcliffe and Ranmoor sites.
- The award-winning Faculty of the Future which forms the heart of the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre.
- The new building and renovations around the former Jessop's Hospital, providing a focus for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.
- The ongoing refurbishment of the Arts Tower.

The mile-long 'campus' now stretches almost unbroken from St George's Square into Crookesmoor, with student residences concentrated in suburbs to the west of the University. For the first fifty years of its existence the University's full-time student population did not rise above 2,000. By 1980, however, it had reached 8,000 and in 2006 the number of full-time students had risen to 21,000. The total student population now tops 24,500 and includes students from all over the world.