As I wended my way through the highways and byways of the campus of Loughborough University, I remembered how this was the venue for the second UK Serials Group Conference in 1979. Twenty years later, I reflected on the many changes that had taken place in the world of serials and the important role played by the person I was about to interview – Professor Jack Meadows.

I received a warm welcome from Jack in a relaxed atmosphere. He was just recovering from a trip to Brazil to launch a Portuguese translation of his latest book, 'Communicating Research'.

He was born in 1934 and began life in Sheffield. His father was a Sergeant in the RAF and as is the case with service families they were always on the move. Very few people can claim to have been to sixteen different schools, and with such a disruptive background few would have achieved such a distinguished academic career. As a boy, model building was an important hobby but he also developed an interest in natural history, particularly trees. His philosophy of life was subsequently greatly influenced by the Goons, not least by the song, 'I talked to the trees, that's why they put me away'.

School number sixteen was important to him. Archbishop Tenison's Grammar School overlooked The Oval where he played cricket for his school. Also, he was there for two whole years! However, the most important aspect of this school was the excellent headmaster, who took Jack under his wing and gave him every sort of encouragement. He even bought him a suit so that he would be suitably dressed for his interview at Oxford, where subsequently he was to win a scholarship to New College, on condition that he obtained an 'O'—level in Latin. After an intensive few months' study he achieved this, proving that he had a natural liking for languages.

Before going up to Oxford he had to complete his National Service. In 1952 he began his basic training with the Royal Artillery in such well—known and dreaded camps as Oswestry and Larkhill. Having completed his training, his life took a most unusual turn. Russian interpreters were urgently needed and after a two-month trial period he cast off his uniform and found himself at Cambridge studying Russian under the Professor of Russian, a remarkable lady who was half-Russian. She had recruited a group of émigrés from behind the Iron Curtain who included a former producer at the Bolshoi Theatre. One of Jack's more unusual assignments was to try and help buy two Irish wolfhounds for Marshall Tito!

After completing his two-year course with flying colours he was commissioned into the Intelligence Corps, and promptly demobbed.
The Army did not entirely free him as he was required to attend camp from time to time.

In October 1955 he arrived at New College, Oxford to read physics. He enjoyed Oxford immensely. The University was going through a period of change as a result of the 1944 Education Act. Although still dominated by public school boys, there was a leavening of mature ex-servicemen plus the intake of boys from state schools often from a non-academic home background.

One day, out of the blue, he received a telephone call from Robert Maxwell who had heard that he was a Russian translator. He was immediately signed up to translate Russian scientific journals, and came to know Maxwell well. It also produced a useful bit of pocket money to supplement his grant.

In 1957 he graduated and went on to obtain a D.Phil. in Astronomy which he achieved in eighteen months. Amongst his other achievements at Oxford were playing cricket for New College and becoming skilled with a punt pole. One of his fellow undergraduates was a Jesuit priest sent to study science. Back home he was a Professor of Philosophy. This gave Jack an entree to the rarefied circle of Oxford philosophers and the Aristotelian Society. He remembers lectures by Iris Murdoch which lasted precisely thirty minutes as she said no-one could concentrate for longer than that. One vacation was spent in the Alps, teaching English to Jesuit priests who were learning mountain craft.

He was best man at a friend's wedding and fell in love with Jane, the chief bridesmaid, and they were married in 1958. His wife is a medical practitioner and specialises in health in schools.

In 1959 he began his career with an appointment at the University of Illinois, Urbana, USA, where as a Fulbright Scholar he taught and did research in astronomy. He also worked during the summer at the California Institute of Technology.

In 1961 he returned to take up a teaching post at the University of St Andrews where, in addition to lecturing in astronomy, he developed an interest in the history of science. He also revived his interest in Russian translation.

Then came a change of course in the direction of books, journals and information when in 1964 he became an Assistant Keeper Class 1 at the British Museum Department of Printed Books and Manuscripts. Always a glutton for punishment, he registered as a part-time student to work for an MSc in the History and Philosophy of Science at University College, London. This involved study in the evenings for two years. His main daytime task was to help start up the National Reference Library for Science and Invention. While at the British Museum he was greatly impressed by the writings of Derek Price, which drew attention to the growth of literature and the information explosion. This was an area which increasingly intrigued Jack, as later events proved.

His next career move was to the University of Leicester. With an MSc under his belt he became Professor of Astronomy and History of Science. The Astronomy Department expanded under his stewardship and he is particularly gratified that the History of Science developed as a subject.

In the mid-60s the Office for Scientific and Technical Information (OSTI) began to take an interest in his work on the growth of literature and its implications. It was not surprising that in the mid-70s the British Library Research and Development Department asked him to set up the Primary Communications Research Centre, designed to warn publishers of the joy and horrors of things to come. From this also developed the Office for Humanities Communication which was intended to encourage the use of computers in the humanities. Jack was well and truly involved in the world of information.

The next major change in his career came when he was asked by the Vice Chancellor of Loughborough University if he would succeed Professor Havard-Williams as Head of the Department of Library and Information Studies – an offer he could not refuse. Moving to his new post in 1986, he retired at the end of this September, but will carry on part time for two years in order to complete a number of projects.

Asked about his tenure at the Library School, Jack feels the greatest change has been away from a library orientation to an information orientation. There is a long lead time for new courses and careful planning is essential. He believes the transition has been smooth thanks to good teamwork.

As always, funding is a problem: as the
student population grows, so do their expectations. There is constant pressure to cut staff and spend more on equipment.

In the general world of information he sees dangers in trying to impose regimes and controls which people cannot accept, for example, in the field of copyright and electronic journals. Even if the controls are right now, this may not be the case in five years' time. He is concerned about the displacement of jobs as a result of automation. The librarian may be an endangered species as the control of information falls into the hands of computer experts; the title University Librarian may not survive; yet the library skills are vital for the future. He gave an interesting example. You have a library specialist and a computer specialist. A user asks for information on the basic properties of copper. He is convinced the faster and more complete answer will come from the library specialist.

Jack's main contributions to information science have been two important books: 'Communication in Science', published by Butterworth in 1974, 'Communicating Research', published by Academic Press in 1998. In addition, he has written some 300 journal articles and numerous conference papers.

The City University has awarded him an Hon.D.Sc. for his work. He is particularly proud to be a Library Association Honorary Vice President as he feels this reflects his 'street cred' with librarians. He was recently delighted by a superbly organised conference at Cranfield University to celebrate his retirement.

Turning now to life outside work, Jack has three children, Alice, the eldest, who works for Blackwell Publishers in Oxford (perhaps fuelling the information explosion!), and then there are the twins. Sally has just qualified as an interpreter in deaf and dumb sign language and Michael is a producer for BBC Radio 1. Life for his wife, Jane, has been very much curtailed by serious back problems, but it is hoped that a recent operation will greatly improve things. One of his favourite areas for walking is the Welsh Marches.

Languages are another hobby, and every so often he tries to acquire a new one. As a Lay Canon of Leicester Cathedral he is involved with many Millennium events, a job requiring good interpersonal skills. Not unconnected with the Cathedral, he is an enthusiastic choral singer which also links with his interest in early music. He is emphatic that he is not a gardener.

From time to time one meets an arrogant academic. Jack is the complete opposite. A courteous, kindly and modest person, he is inclined to play down his achievements. As he reaches retirement and stands back to take stock of his career he must feel a warm glow. Those sixteen schools must have done a good job after all, but the final accolade should go to his old headmaster, who saw young Jack's potential and set him off on the path that led to such an outstanding and successful career.