Exploring an archive can sometimes bring to mind the work of a sculptor as they cut, chisel and carve to reveal the true form of a piece from its native stone or wood; exposing the reality within. Certainly some of the material found in our Archive & Special Collections reveals more than meets the eye about our University's association with the original Leeds College of Art and sculptors Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Keith Rowntree delves into the sculptors' association with us.

Henry Moore himself did not disguise his dislike of some aspects of his time at what he knew as Leeds School of Art. In particular he found the academic drawing from antique casts dull and repetitive. These casts, modelled from Greek and Roman statues had been used by students since the early days of the school and caked in layers of chalky white wash, must have seemed the very epitome of what Moore regarded as the stifled art education of the time. He longed for innovation, experimentation and self-expression. When Reginald T. Cotterill set up a sculpture department at the college, Moore was handed a chance to progress and for a time was his only sculpture student. Later others joined the department including Barbara Hepworth. Moore's aim throughout his two years at Leeds was to pass the Board of Education examinations and win a scholarship to the Royal College of Art in London.

Moore and Hepworth are regarded as 'superstars' in the art world and any art college worth its salt is going to take the opportunity to make the most of any relationship even if it was relatively brief. Reference is often made to their association with college with attention focused on the present day college based at Blenheim Walk and Vernon Street. Vernon St was indeed the building created for Leeds School of Art in 1903. However, it is little acknowledged that in 1969 the original college moved to purpose-built studios on Woodhouse Lane, then part of the Leeds Central Colleges which in 1970 became Leeds Polytechnic.

Meanwhile the then Leeds Branch College of Art, created in 1967, steadily developed courses to match the original Leeds College of Art. It occupied the vacant Vernon St building, renaming itself Jacob Kramer College and more recently Leeds College of Art, assuming the mantle and heritage of the old college, including Moore and Hepworth, and celebrating the continuity provided by the iconic Vernon St buildings. Many staff at both the original colleges disliked the idea of art education provision in Leeds being split, which resulted in higher diploma courses and vocational and pre-diploma courses being cut off from each other. But the political and administrative decisions had been irreversibly made and the two colleges went their separate ways.

And what of the original Leeds College of Art? By 1970 it had been renamed the Faculty of Art & Design as part of Leeds Polytechnic but the 'marriage' of art, technology and commerce was uneasy and difficult, at least to begin with. Over the intervening years the 'College' grew and evolved under many different names within the structure of the Polytechnic and its successor, Leeds Metropolitan University. This continuity was little celebrated, understandably perhaps, as the fledgling Polytechnic forged its own unique identity with modest regard to its recent past. In time the University forgot its hidden inheritance, leaving its heritage untold and overlooking a buried art college archive. But the essential threads of continuity still do exist from the original Leeds College of Art.

Since 2008, parts of this heritage have been rediscovered under the auspices of our Archive. They uncover, just like the revelation of a sculpture, a true narrative of the original Leeds College of Art and the real connection of Moore and Hepworth with our University.