# An appreciation of Tom Wilson

*Amanda Cossham*

## Introduction

Tom Wilson's information behaviour and information retrieval research and his stellar publishing record make him one of the most significant figures in library and information studies. One aspect that may be less well-known is his kindness and generosity towards new and emerging researchers and more junior colleagues. This short piece talks about his willingness to support those researchers, to provide advice, to be interviewed, to give of his time and expertise to foster the development and engagement of them within the profession.

I volunteered as a copy editor for *Information Research* in 2007, in response to Tom's call for support for the journal. At the time, I was relatively new to lecturing and research and working in a New Zealand institution that taught undergraduate LIS programmes. New Zealand is a long way from anywhere and it's expensive to attend international conferences. It was harder to build networks that it is in a post-COVID world too. As well, every time I came across an excellent article, it was published in *Information Research*. I did not have a PhD but was considering one and was embarking on research projects.

Volunteering seemed like a good way to develop networks, learn more about scholarly publishing, refine ideas about a thesis topic, and read in detail the most up-to-date research. It was also a chance to indulge my enthusiasm for grammar and a nitpicking approach to referencing and detail generally (I lectured in cataloguing …). I expected a copy editing test, scrutiny, and evaluation of my work to ensure I was capable. Tom accepted me immediately with none of the preamble. 'The more the merrier' was his attitude.

Tom was great to work with and for. He may have (and probably did) improve my initial copyediting efforts, but I never compared my work with the published papers, and he was always encouraging. I learned the journal style, adapting to its various quirks and stylistic requirements, and improved my ability to code and trouble-shoot HTML, since at the time the journal required authors to provide a final version of their paper fully coded (increasingly a problem for many authors who had not been involved with the WWW in the 1990s). Some of the style has become hard-wired in my thinking, writing, and reviewing (behaviour is always singular; acronyms and initialisms should be avoided at all costs), and I maintain a fondness for the Oxford comma.

I worked directly with the regional editors and with experienced as well as up-and-coming authors, and most were an absolute pleasure to engage with, appreciating that together we could add some polish to the papers. I met some at conferences subsequently, although I've never had the opportunity to meet Tom in person.

Tom was always supportive of the copy editors who, like me, were mostly junior researchers or practitioners. He respected our work and let us get on with it. I recall one difficult author, who grandly declined to accept many of the changes I'd made to his paper to bring it in line with the journal's style, telling me he 'preferred his own way'. After several exchanges, I referred his emails

to Tom, asking 'What now?' and got the response 'Leave it to me!' A couple of weeks later I received what can only be described as a grovelling email from the author, apologising for not respecting my work, saying he had not understood I was an academic like himself (and a volunteer), and agreeing that all the changes could be accepted. It was a fine example of both Tom's willingness to back the copy editors and of the considerable reputation and clout he had in the profession.

Tom renamed the role as Copy Editors and Editorial Associates in the late 2000s to recognise the value we brought to the publishing process. He always acknowledged that the copy editors' work was done voluntarily but was far less prestigious than being on the editorial board or serving as a regional editor, despite being significant for maintaining the quality of published papers. He invited me to join the Editorial Advisory Board in 2010, and when the regional editor for Australasia and South-East Asia, Alistair Smith, retired at the end of 2013, Tom offered me the opportunity to replace him. At the time, I was about half-way through my doctoral studies, and this was a significant opportunity that would have been very unlikely without the years of copy editing behind it.

An Australian colleague at Monash University who was part of my Ph.D support team commented once that 'Tom Wilson has always been intellectually generous'. It's that aspect, along with his collegiality and generosity to new and emerging researchers and junior colleagues, that I hope I have conveyed here, and that approach to other academics, researchers, and colleagues which has guided my work, and led to my current role. Thank you, Tom, It has been and continues to be a pleasure contributing to *Information Research.*

## About the author

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