# Untangling Academic Publishing

A history of the relationship between commercial interests, academic prestige and the circulation of research



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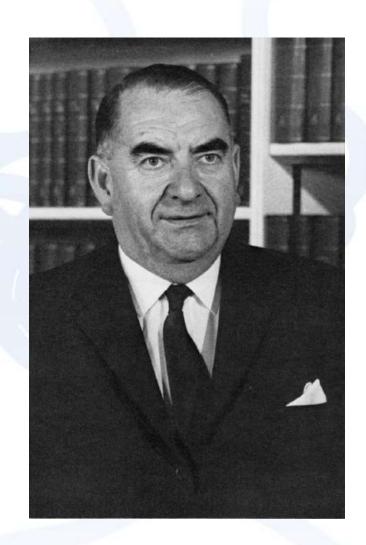
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#UntanglingAcPub

#### The view from 1957

Maintaining the highest attainable standards in publishing scientific papers is the greatest service scientific societies could render to the community...
[through] high-class refereeing.

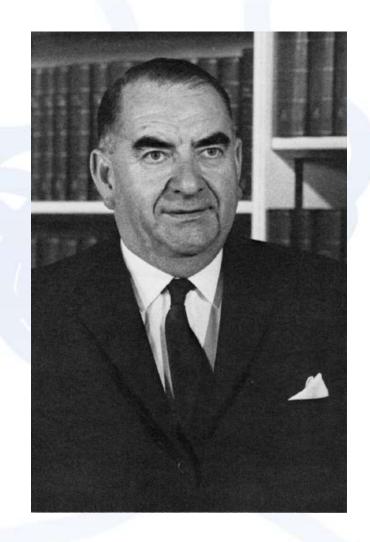
Scientific societies must continue to predominate in scientific journal publication, for the moment commercial gain began to dominate this field the welfare of the scientific community would suffer.



David Christie Martin Executive Secretary to the Royal Society

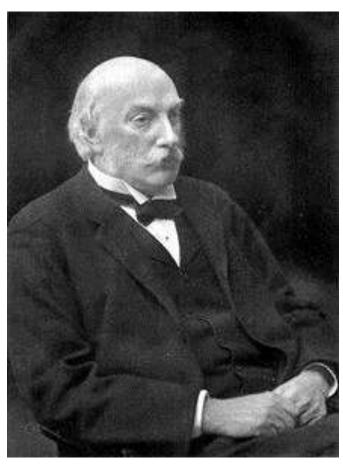
#### The view from 1957

... several commercial publishing houses had realized that there was quite a bit of money to be made in scientific publications... Scientific societies should be the guardians of the quality of scientific publication of original work in learned journals. That was their chief raison d'etre. The commercial houses had another aim in life and their high charges, justified on commercial grounds, might become a danger...



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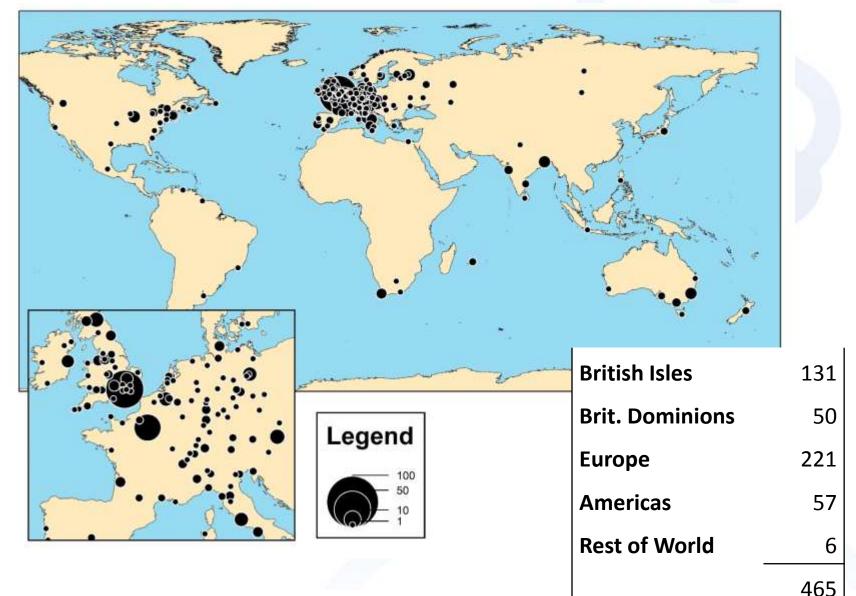
#### The view from 1895



Lord Rayleigh
Secretary to the Royal Society

'A scientific journal... is not a profitable undertaking, even though the contributors are, in contrast to the contributors to a literary journal, paid nothing for their contributions...; the expenses are so great, the public so small, and the incidental remuneration by advertisements so uncertain and insignificant... [Hence,] the scientific journals in this country,... are carried on with great difficulty..., and at a loss...'

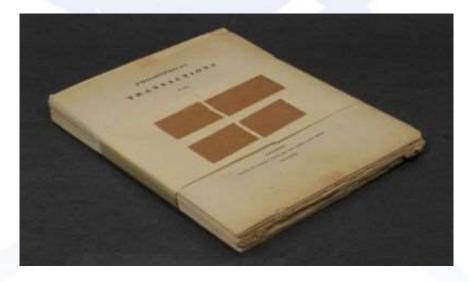
# Free circulation of Royal Society publications, 1908



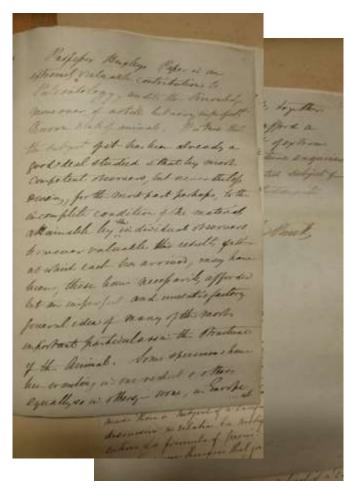
# Rewards and Recognition in the 19thC



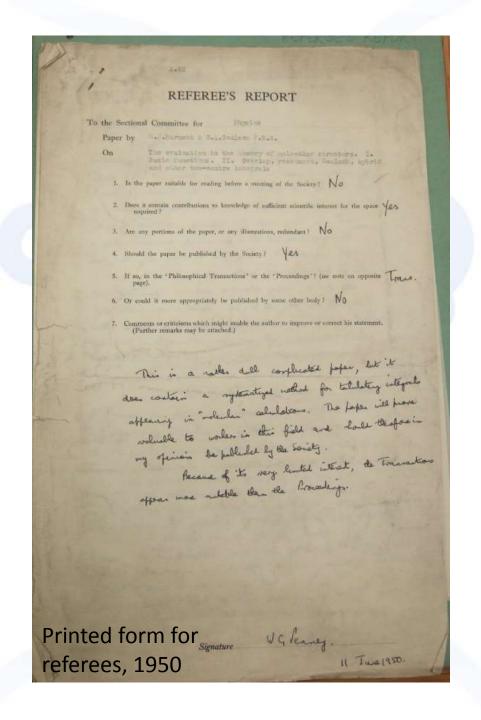




## Refereeing



George Busk took five pages to recommend publication of TH Huxley's 1861 paper on Glyptodon



#### Independent Journals



#### PHILOSOPHICAL MAGAZINE.

COMPREHENDING

THE VARIOUS BRANCHES OF SCIENCE,

THE LIBERAL AND FINE ARTS,

AGRICULTURE, MANUFACTURES,

COMMERCE.

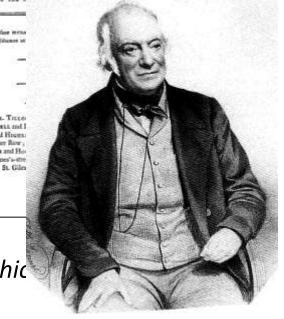
BY ALEXANDER TILLOCH,

REMARK OF THE L

" Ner avantarism fine terms William quale or all excit lithurnes set

Printed for ALEX. TICKO Combill; Capres and I MURRAY and Higgs. Patermoster Row, VERNOR and Hor St. James's-stre

Philosophic (f.1798)



Richard Taylor (1781-1858)



#### A WEEKLY ILLUSTRATED JOURNAL OF SCIENCE

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1869.

NATURE: APHORISMS BY GOETHE her, and powedess to penetrate beyond her.

Without asking, or varning, she snatches us up into her circling dance, and which us on until we tient, and drop from her arms.

She is ever shaging new forme: what in, has no yet been; what has been, comes not again. Eve thing is new, and yet nought but the old.

We live in her micht und know ber not. She incommitty speaking to us, but betrays not her sec-We constantly not upon her, and yet have no you

The one thing she seems to aim at it Individuals pet she caree nothing for individuals. She is also building up and destroying; but her workshop

Har life is in her children; but where is the moch She is the only artist; working up the most unifo manerial into unter opposites; arriving, without a tra of effort, at perfection, at the most exact precisi though always reiled under a certain softness.

Each of her works him an enumer of its ow each of her phenomena a special characterisation and yet their diversity is in unity.

She performs a play; we know not whether she so it herself, and yet she acts for us, the lookers on Incessant life, development, and movement in her, but she advances not. She changes for eand ever, and rests not a moment. Quietude inconceivable to her, and she has laid her ou upon rest. She is firm. Her steps are mensurher exceptions rare, her laws unchangeable.

She has always thought and always thinks; thou nut us a man, but as Nature. She broods over

all-comprehending idea, which no searching can

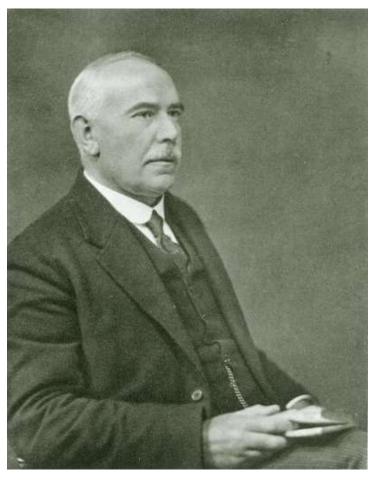
Mankind dwell in her and she in them. With all N ATURE! We are surrounded and embraced more sho plays a game for love, and rejoices the more by betti governess to separate curvature from they win. With many, her moves are so hidden, that the game is over before they know it.

That which is most unsatural is still Nature; the



Norman Lockyer (1836-1920)

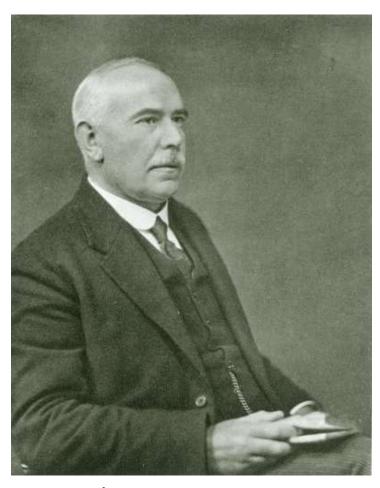
# The Prestige of Publication, 1936



Louis Filon
Vice-President of the Royal Society

'The publications of the Society have always been recognized as of exceptionally high standard, and special significance has been attached to papers published in them.'

# The Prestige of Publication, 1936



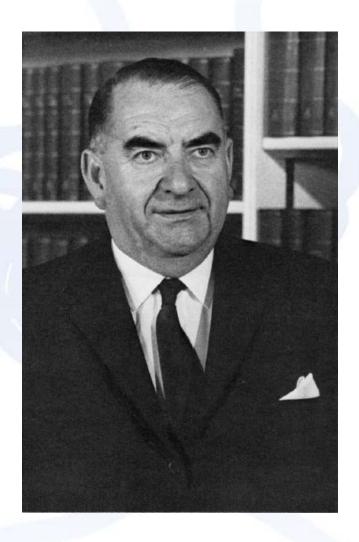
Louis Filon
Vice-President of the Royal Society

'For appointments to academic and other posts, appointing bodies have often no means of discriminating between important and trivial research, except the particular medium of publication. ...

... a spate of trivial papers may easily outweigh, in the minds of lay persons [on academic appointing bodies], a few really valuable contributions, with results ultimately detrimental to the best interests of Science.'

## The 1950s: flipping the system

... several commercial publishing houses had realized that there was quite a bit of money to be made in scientific publications...

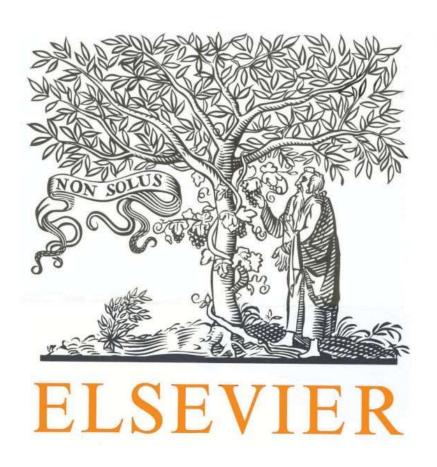


David Christie Martin Executive Secretary to the Royal Society

#### Golden Years for the Commercial Model?



## New Players, New Strategies





Robert Maxwell, of Pergamon Press

## Golden Years, 1950s-1960s

- Capacity for growth in research
- Increased circulation globally
- Learned societies finances become less strained
- Refereeing can be done by commercial firms...

98HF. 160.2.8

THE ROYAL SOCIETY

Code for the publication of new scientific journals

The present tendency for commercial publishers to initiate new scientific journals in great numbers is causing concern to many people. With the expansion of established sciences and advances into new fields and disciplines it is evident that new journals are necessary. Ideally, the best body to start and to run a journal is a scientific society, but if this is impossible, a journal should only be put in the bands of a commercial publisher with the following safeguards:

- scientific and editorial policy should be in the hands of a board of responsible scientific editors
- financial policy should be formulated, and altered, only in agreement with the scientific editorial board;
- nomination to the editorial board should be in the hands of the scientific editors and not the publishers;
- copyright should remain with the authors or be assigned to the scientific editorial board;
- no agreement should be signed until competent legal advice had been sought.

# Royal Society recognises that things have changed...

'Ideally, the best body to start and to run a journal is a scientific society, but if this is impossible, a journal should only be put in the hands of a commercial publisher with the following safeguards...'

1963

#### End of the Golden Years

- University funding...
- Since the 1980s, university libraries have faced steady or falling budgets.
- Where then, are the customers that the commercial model needs?
- Academic culture, and the prioritization of research
- Since the 1980s, increasing expectations of research outputs and excellence

## The Effect on Monographs

Serials crisis was also a monograph crisis

Lower sales, therefore new strategies needed to remain profitable

- Acquisitions and mergers
- Higher prices
- Diversification and cross-subsidy
- Exit the field of academic publishing

The significance of decision-making in the publication of monographs

- Intellectual criteria, and also...?
- Outsourcing?

Why are we stuck with a model of academic publishing that is past its use-by date?

#### What can we do?

- Think of communication/publishing as a service to scholarship
- Can be paid for, but should seek value for money

Does prestige culture hamper academic take-up of OA?

- Reform university recognition systems?
- Provide prestige-bearing alternatives that are cost-effective and good for circulation?

Role of universities and learned societies?

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