

# Untangling Academic Publishing

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



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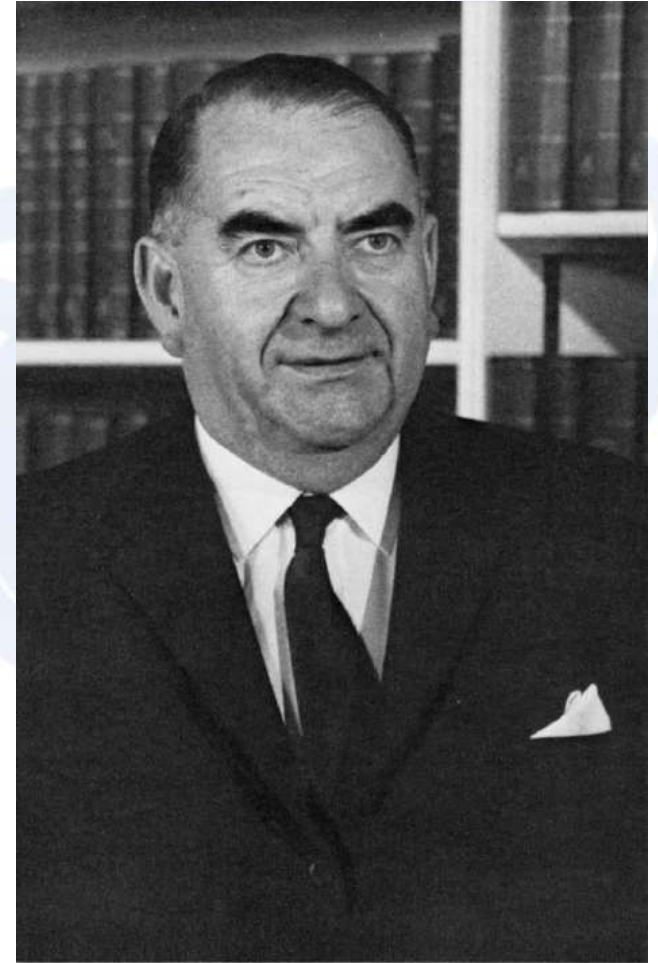
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#UntanglingAcPub

# 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.

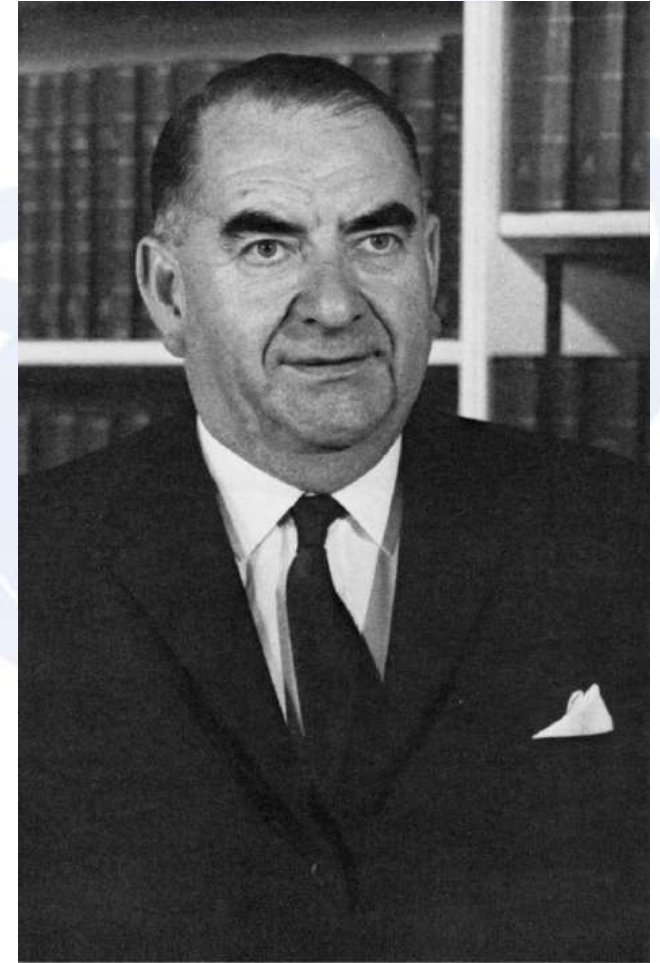
Scientific societies must continue to predominate in scientific journal publication, for the moment commercial gain began to dominate this field the welfare of the scientific community would suffer.



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'être*. The commercial houses had another aim in life and their high charges, justified on commercial grounds, might become a danger...



David Christie Martin  
Executive Secretary to the Royal Society

# The view from 1895

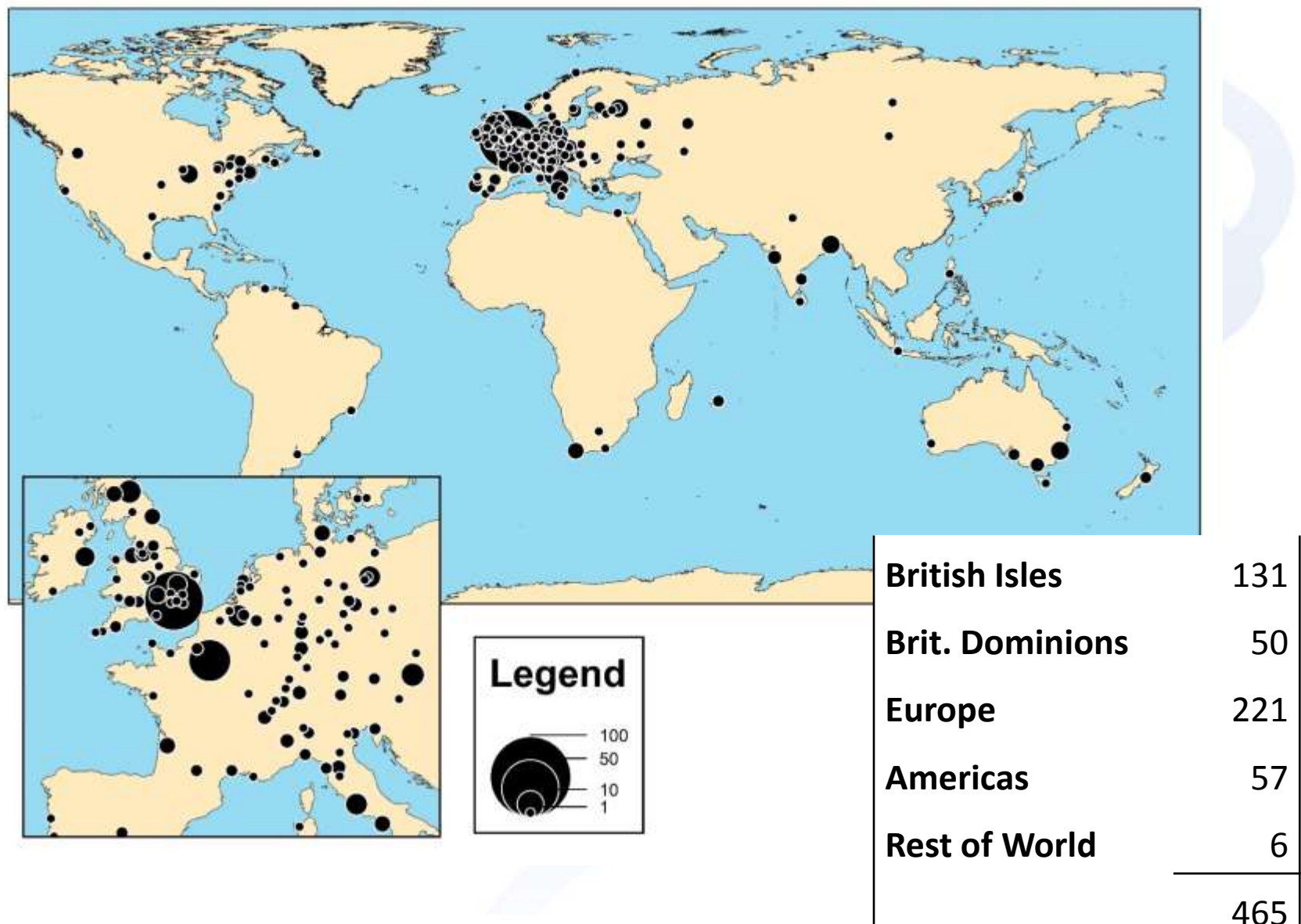


Lord Rayleigh  
Secretary to the Royal Society

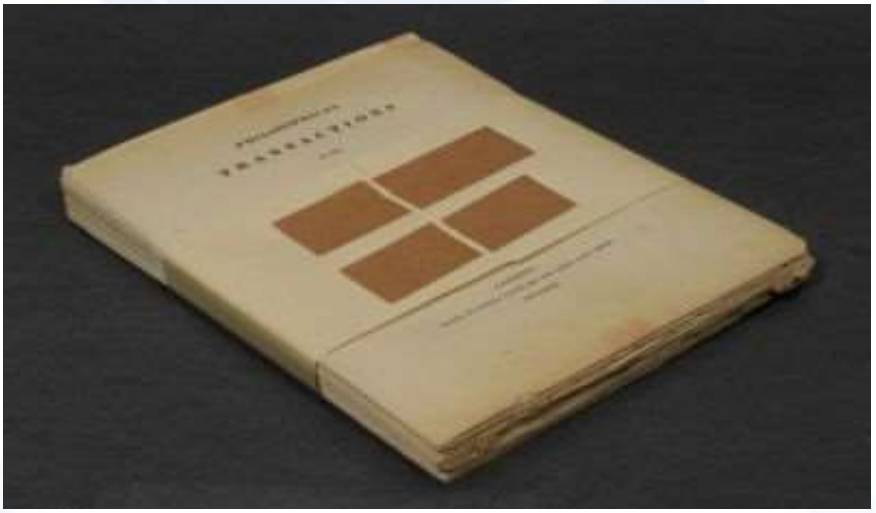
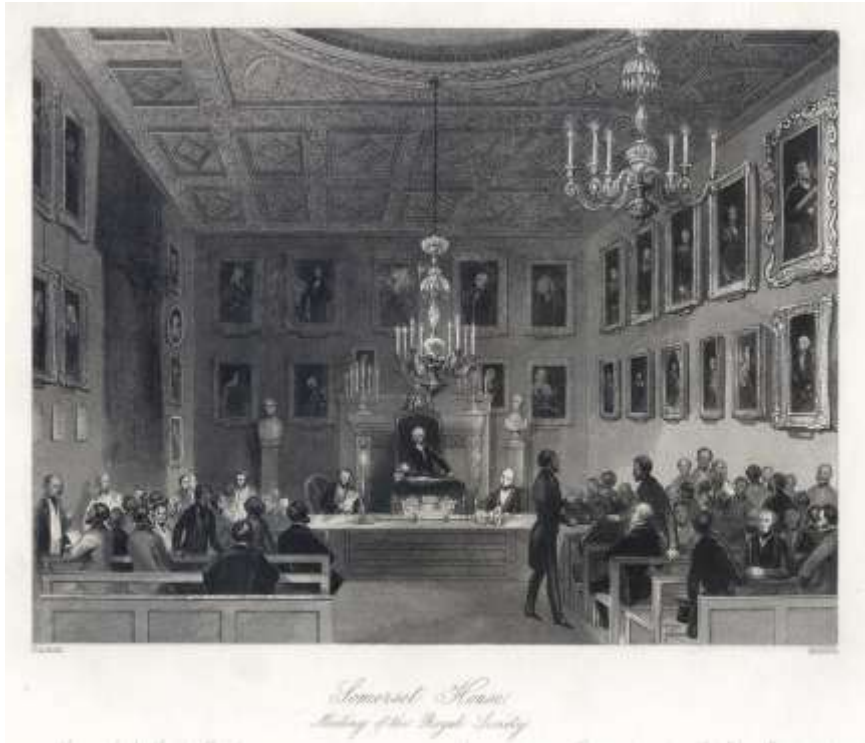
‘A scientific journal... is not a profitable undertaking, even though the contributors are, in contrast to the contributors to a literary journal, paid nothing for their contributions...; the expenses are so great, the public so small, and the incidental remuneration by advertisements so uncertain and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

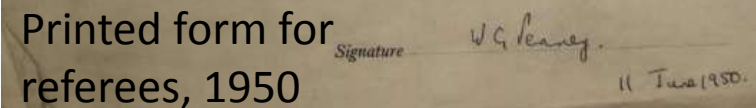
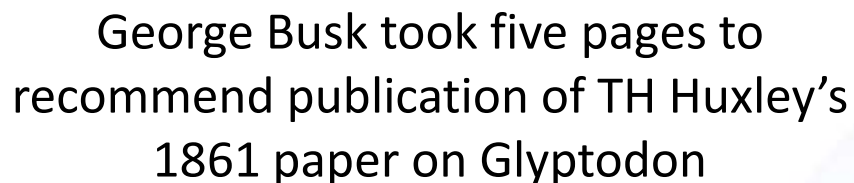


# Free circulation of Royal Society publications, 1908



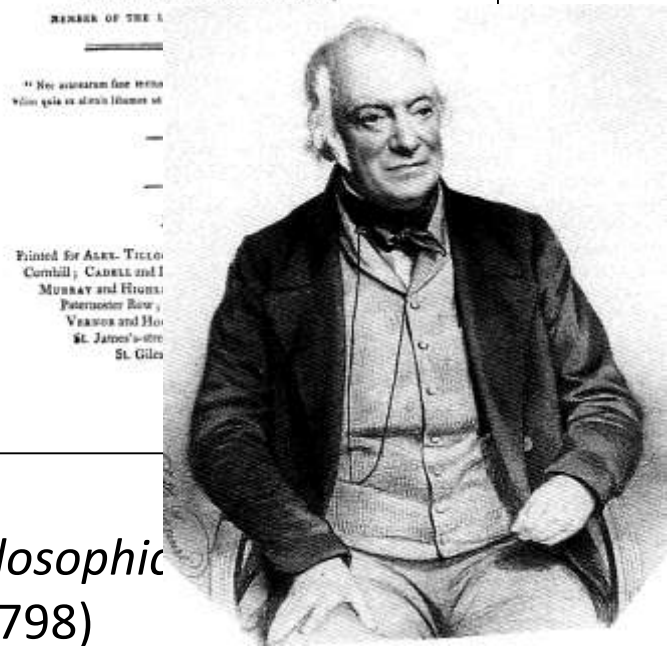
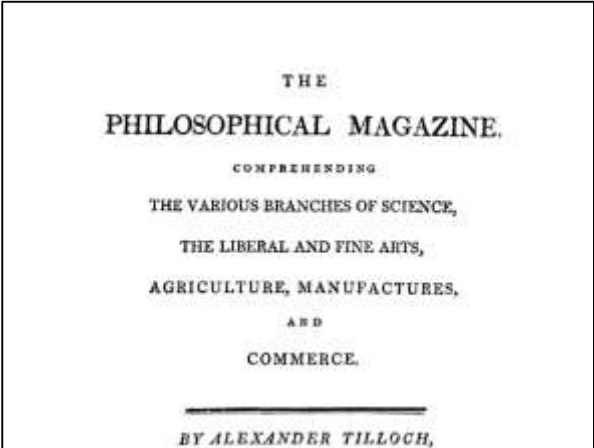
# Rewards and Recognition in the 19thC





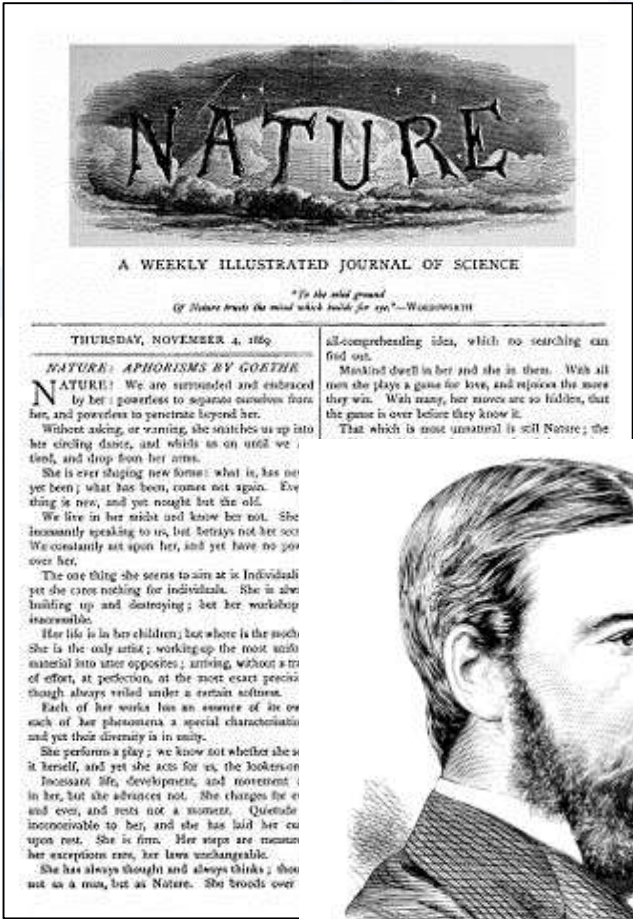


# Independent Journals



Philosophic  
(f.1798)

Richard Taylor (1781-1858)

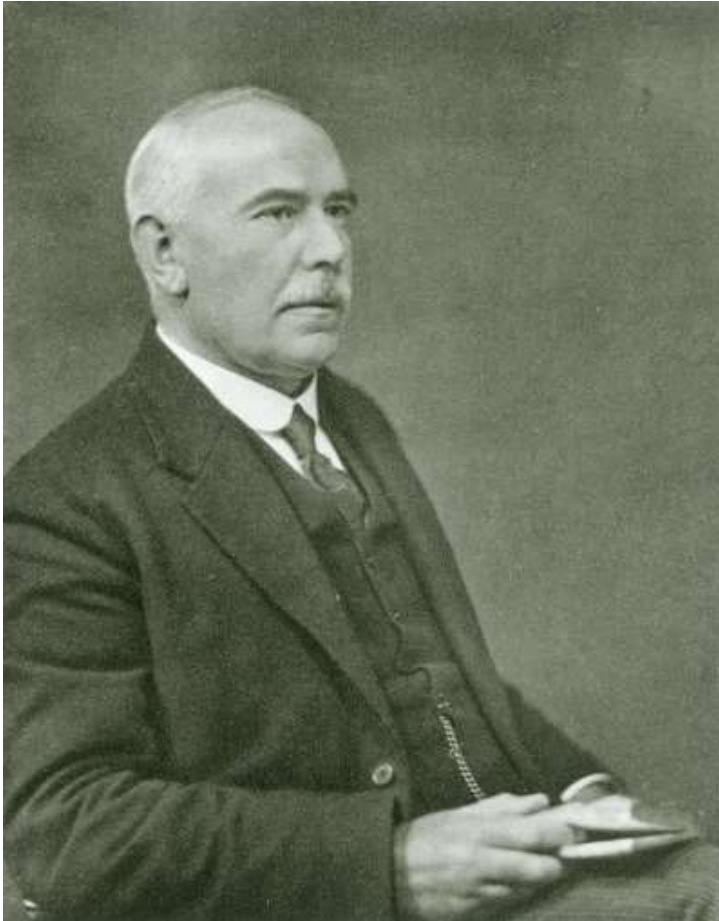


N

Norman Lockyer (1836-1920)



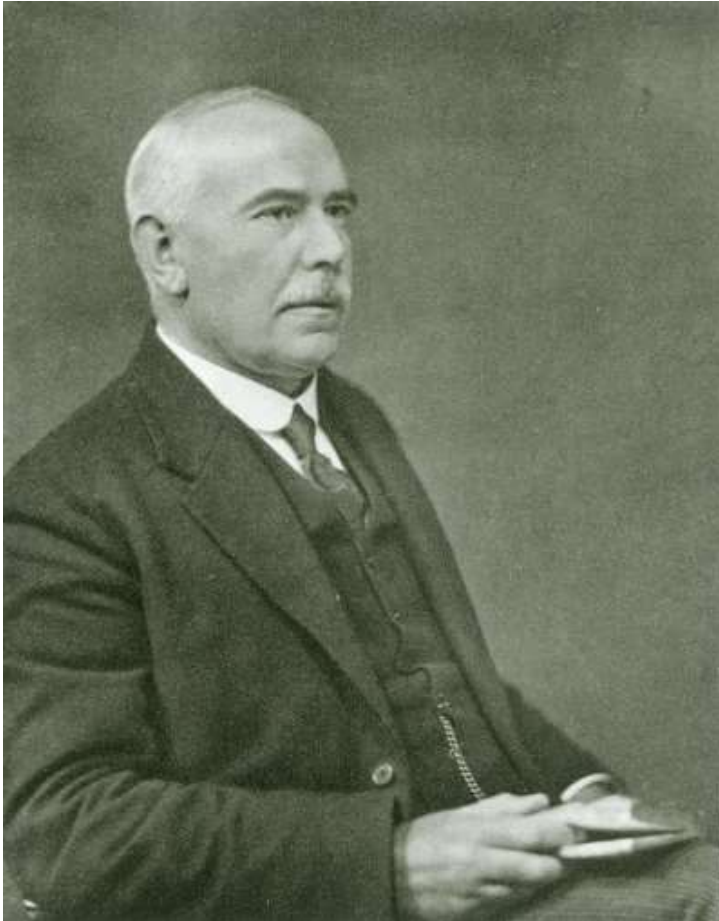
# The Prestige of Publication, 1936



‘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.’

Louis Filon  
Vice-President of the Royal Society

# The Prestige of Publication, 1936



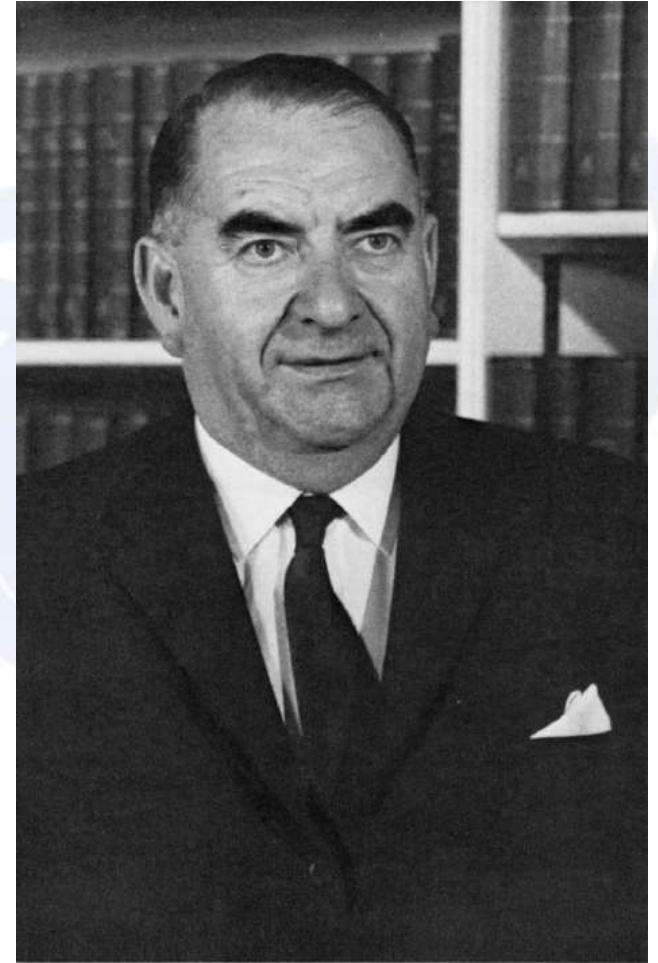
Louis Filon  
Vice-President of the Royal Society

‘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...



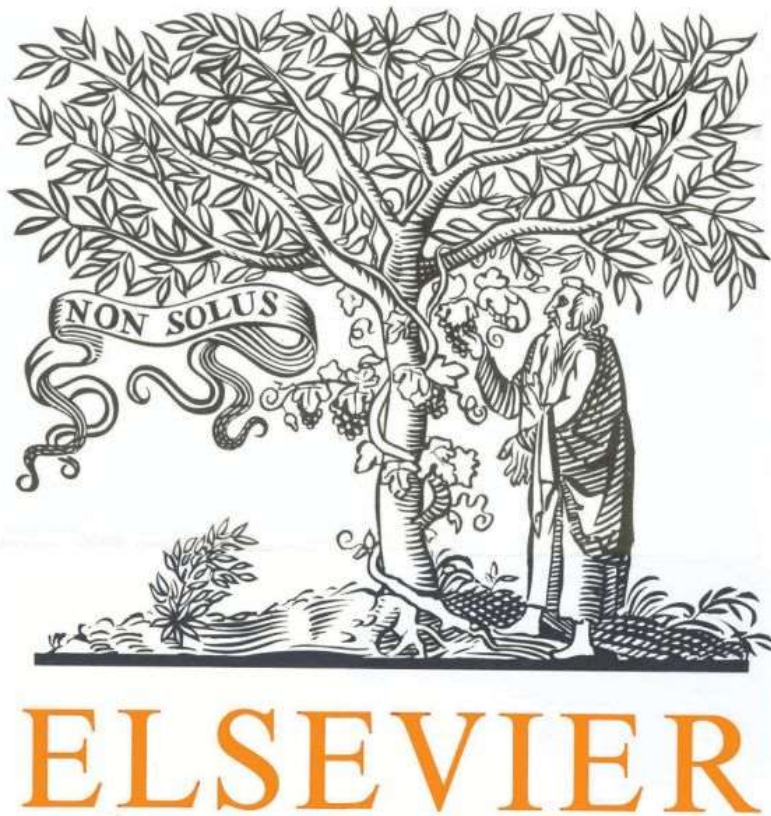
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Executive Secretary to the Royal Society

# Golden Years for the Commercial Model?



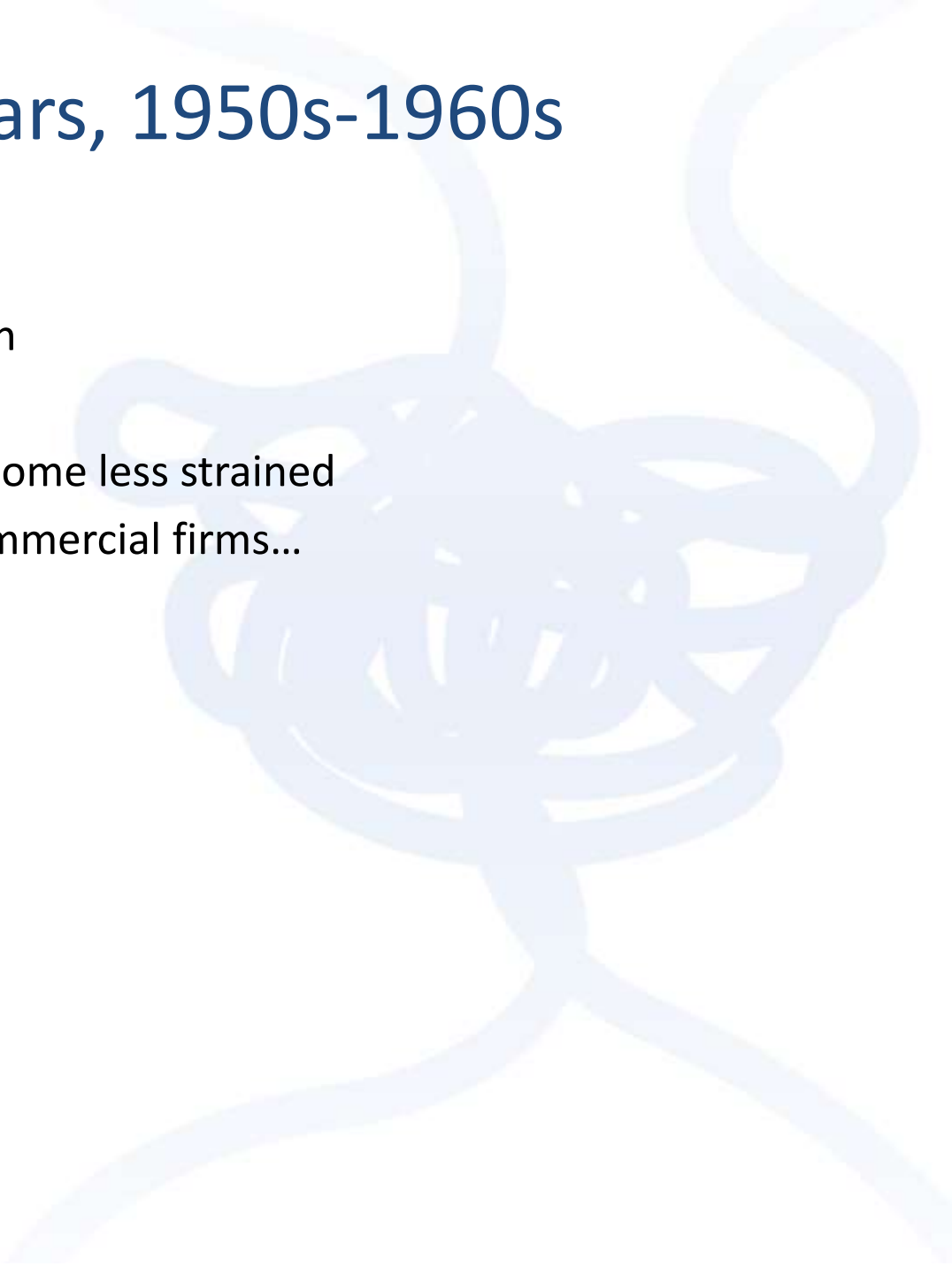


# New Players, New Strategies

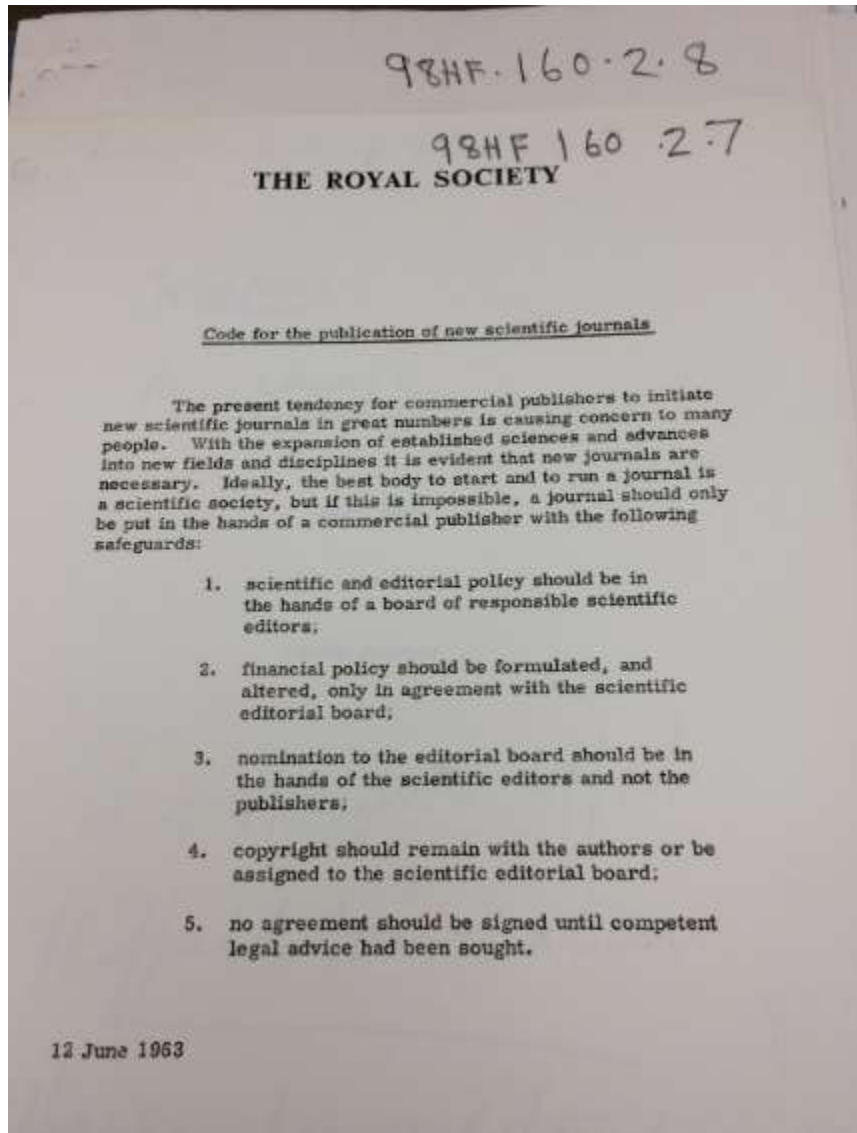


Robert Maxwell, of Pergamon Press

# 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...
- 

# 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

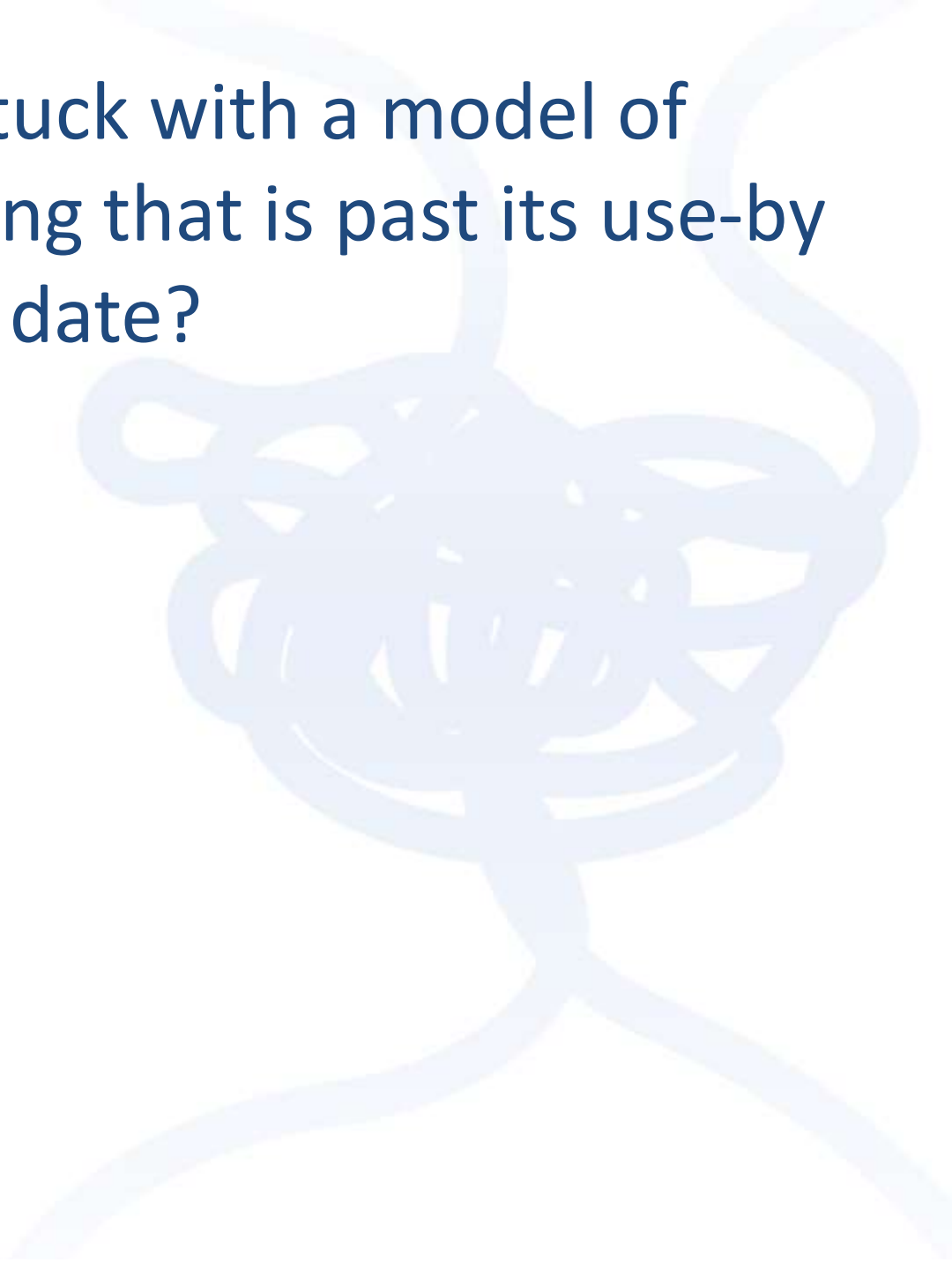
Lower sales, therefore new strategies needed to remain profitable

- 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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