

24th April, 1935

Dr. E.J.Allen,
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of the United Kingdom,
The Laboratory,
Citadel Hill,
PLYMOUTH

Dear Dr. Allen.

I agree entirely with the views of your letter, but I am rather alarmed at its last paragraph. Certainly I had no idea that the existence of the Archives at the British Museum was being used as an argument for cutting down Government grants for printing. The true criterion appears to be this: that where the author and editor agree that full publication of detailed data would be of immediate service to other workers, there is no substitute for full publication, and though this is expensive, it is, as you point out, an expense small compared to that of the original work from which the data are derived.

The function of the Archives is in cases in which the editor or the author considers that detailed publication would serve no immediate purpose, and where there does appear to be a case for regarding the original measurements or counts as being potentially of value in the future. We have ample evidence that, in many fields, large bodies of data which have cost much to produce, have neither been published in full nor put on record in either institutional or national archives. This seems frequently to happen because it is thought that a diagram is a

satisfactory substitute for a printed table, so that, instead of being used for their proper purpose of illustrating and emphasising the salient points of a research, the diagrams are often rendered unintelligible, owing to the effort to use them as a substitute for printed tables. When this procedure is criticised, the defence invariably put forward is that diagrams are cheaper to print than the tables, and that the journal concerned cannot afford to print both.

Owing to the central character of the Plymouth laboratory in marine biological research, I imagine that there is a strong case for establishing there an institutional collection containing records and primary documents, note-books etc., of the work which is always in progress. I have seen enough of similar work at Rothamstead to know that such an institutional collection needs to be put definitely in the charge of some one individual, perhaps a librarian, or, with some advantage, a statistician, who will make it his business to see that the records deposited are complete and intelligible for future use; and it was principally to inquire to what extent Plymouth is already equipped to deal with this business, that I wrote previously.

As between institutional and national archives, there is, I believe, no danger of friction or difficulty; all deposits to the national collection are made voluntarily, and only for the sake of making more widely available, material which, it is thought, may be of more than purely institutional interest. These deposits are, presumably, always copies of the original

matter kept in the institutional archives . At Rothamstead, for example, only a very small proportion of the great bulk of material which is put away annually could be thought suitable for deposit at the Natural History Museum. The only cases which cross my mind are certain surveys of the insect fauna, and data of a metrical character on the discrimination of nearly allied forms of plant parasites. I do hope, however, that you will bear the existence of the London archives in mind and encourage their use in cases in which you think they may be useful.

When one gets down to details on a scientific paper, whether in the nature of a survey or a systematic series of experiments, one invariably finds that the data, as printed, are not ~~the~~entirely full statement of the data as gathered. The author, as it seems to me, rightly and inevitably, has made some selection of what he judges to be relevant to his research. In perhaps the commonest case, averages or totals may be given ^{cut} ~~with~~/the single items of which they are composed. Inquiries by other workers for these single items are too often met with the reply that the original data are no longer available. I do not think you intend to advocate that this difficulty should be overcome by enlarging every scientific paper so as to include every detail, irrespective of the author's judgment of its importance to his conclusions; yet some of what you say in your letter might be taken to mean that you have no use for storage of raw data in any circumstances.

The notice I have put in the "Annals of Eugenics" may be more suitable to your own requirements than the one I suggested previously; it reads;

"The Annals of Eugenics publishes bodies of original data in extenso, in order to make them available for future study. A summary statement, pointing out the important features of the data, may, however, take the place of original observations too extensive to be put in full, provided that these are filed in the archives set up for their reception at the British Museum (Natural History)."

What we ask is, in fact, that you should give contributors the choice between (a) detailed publication and (b) less detailed publication, supplemented by public access to stored material. Whether it is stored at Plymouth only, or also in London, would seem to depend entirely on the convenience of those who may wish to have access to the data.

Yours sincerely,