

Publishing South African scholarship in the global academic community

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Summary:

South Africa's academic publishing history has been profoundly influenced by its colonial heritage. This is reflected in the publication of the *Transactions of the South African Philosophical Society* (later, the Royal Society of South Africa) from 1878. While the society and journal aimed to promote original research about South Africa, it was modelled after the Royal Society in London and formed part of an imperial scientific community. As the local higher education institutions grew more independent and research-focused, local scholarly publishing developed as well, with university presses playing an increasingly important role. Unisa Press started publishing departmental journals in the 1950s, with a focus on journals that "speak to the student", and is today the only South African university press with an active journals publishing programme. As external funding declined and the country became intellectually isolated in the high apartheid period, the Press managed to attract journals that could no longer be subsidised by learned societies and other universities. More recently, new co-publishing arrangements have brought South African journals back into an international intellectual community. While some argue that this constitutes a re-colonisation of South African knowledge production, it is also an innovative strategy for positioning local research in a global context.

Key words: scholarly publishing, South Africa, journals publishing, co-publishing

Introduction

Like other former colonies, South Africa's intellectual history has been profoundly influenced by its colonial heritage. Historians of science emphasise that "colonial intellectuals were part of the network of imperial knowledge"¹ and describe the circulation of ideas between the colonies and the metropolitan centres. However, they seldom focus on the actual media for circulating and disseminating such research, the scholarly books and journals published, and the publishing practices which underlie their production. In this paper, I will examine the development of academic journals in South Africa, through three key periods: The first is the colonial period, from the 1820s until the early twentieth century, in which British institutions and forms were recreated in the colonies.² This period coincides with the early development of print culture in South Africa, with the first newspapers and mission presses.³ Colonial men of science engaged in descriptive research, often with the stated purpose of advancing civilisation or at least the Empire, throughout this period. The intended audience was mostly the metropolitan centres, but also the local research community.

The second is a period of emerging independence and growing national pride in local accomplishments, including scientific advances, from the 1920s until the 1980s. South Africa's universities grew and flourished during this period, becoming more independent and promoting local research for both a local and an international audience. However, this independence was both distorted and reached its apogee under the Nationalist apartheid government (from 1948 until 1994), as the country experienced intellectual isolation. Seemingly paradoxically, such isolation had a positive effect on the local publishing industry. The third period is one of internationalisation, in which democratisation, from the early 1990s, coincided with new technologies for online publication. This enabled the sharing of knowledge in an unprecedented manner to bring South African academic journals back onto a global stage.

This case study of the development of academic journals adds to our understanding of how scholarly journals developed outside of Europe. It reveals the spread of British models of journals publishing, even while these were still being formed, but also the adaptation of these traditions in different historical circumstances. In South Africa, the specific effects of the academic boycott and isolationism under apartheid affected the circulation of scientific knowledge, although it is now clear that the end of apartheid has seen a return to international business models. The South African case is also of interest because, while learned societies led to the formation and growth of journals publishing, university presses have been integral to their continued existence.

The colonial period

As in other British colonies, settlers brought ideas of science and research – the “tools of empire”⁴ – with them when they emigrated to or visited South Africa in the nineteenth century. Higher education was introduced into the colonies of South Africa with the South African College in 1829, and the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1873.⁵ Scientific bodies, such as a museum and library, and scholarly societies were set up in parallel with the formal institutions of higher education. The first of these, the South African Literary Society, was established in 1824 by John Fairbairn, and modelled on the “upwardly mobile, utilitarian and dissenting traditions of the Newcastle Lit. and Phil.”⁶ It was quickly censored by the colonial government for its subversive views. As the South African Literary and Scientific Institution (formed from a merger with the South African Institution in 1832) it was the dominant society until the 1850s, drawing together “people who were interested in improving and sharing their knowledge, who publicised their findings and who endeavoured to discover the interesting scientific

aspects of the Cape Colony and even of the subcontinent beyond”.⁷ It would soon be joined by societies in a wide range of fields, including the Horticultural Society and the Albany Natural History Society. Dubow points out that the intellectual community in the Cape at this time was largely Anglicised and “consciously conceived of itself as part of the imperial mission, with a natural responsibility to promote civilised values as well as the latest scientific thinking”.⁸ And scientific journals, which were experiencing a period of growth after the 1870s in Britain, were seen as an important and even natural part of this mission.⁹

As well as societies, the settlers launched a variety of (often short-lived) periodicals, including the *South African Journal* (1824), the *South African Chronicle* (1826-26), the *South African Quarterly Journal* (1830-36) and the *Cape Literary Gazette* (1830-35). Dubow describes these as being modelled on British examples, but, “with a high proportion of local content, they shared a common commitment to the encouragement of reading and the diffusion of ‘useful’ knowledge”.¹⁰ Their role was to report on new ideas from the metropole, as well as local discoveries: they “reported, synthesized, and reacted to intellectual developments within the British world”.¹¹ Some of the journals explicitly linked their aims to the scientific societies, as the *South African Quarterly Journal* did when its editor told members of the Literary and Scientific Institution that one of his intentions was to put “on record for the use of members, whatsoever of the papers read there may appear of permanent or extensive interest”.¹² The decline of the Society by 1838, despite the merger with the South African Institution, was attributed by an historian to the demise of the *Quarterly Journal*: “... I think that a serious check to its scientific activities and to the desire of members to do research work must have been that there was no publication of papers given to the Society.”¹³ The early journals were mostly short-lived, due to the transience of the early settler population, and the difficulties of print and dissemination through the fledgling mail service.

There is a symbiotic relationship between journals and learned societies: the journals publicised the activities of the societies and lent them credibility, while the societies provided a ready source of authors, readers and subscribers.¹⁴ The *Cape Monthly Magazine* (1857–1860; 1870–1881) was the longest-lived of these periodicals in English, but even it did not survive the transition from one editorial group to another after the death of its founder in 1875. This may explain why the oldest continuously operating journal in South Africa was closely linked with the South African Philosophical Society. This was founded in 1877, after the decline of the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, to prioritise science and

research; its aims were “to promote Original Research and record its results, especially as concerned with the Natural History, Physical Condition, History, Geography, Statistics, Industrial Resources, Languages and Traditions of South Africa”.¹⁵ The new Society approached the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Bartle Frere, to serve as President. Once it had collected sufficient funds from members through subscriptions, the Society began publishing the *Transactions of the South African Philosophical Society*. This is the journal we now know as *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, a name it has had since the Society received its Royal Charter in 1908.¹⁶

The *Transactions* covered the same range of scientific disciplines as the Society, and emphasised its close relationship by including proceedings of meetings as well as information on office bearers. A key aim was to emphasise the credibility of the Society, which its President in 1910 described as having “uniformly secured the confidence of scientists, administrative bodies, and the public as representative of the interests of true science”,¹⁷ and which Dubow sees as marking “the inauguration of scientific specialization and professionalization in South Africa”.¹⁸ The journal also conferred credibility on the authors by validating the originality of named contributions.¹⁹ Almost all early papers were first read at meetings of the Society and this reading was a form of editorial selection prior to publication. Not all papers read were printed: in the first year, only eight of 18 papers read were printed. As in Victorian London, the spoken word was regarded as the primary means of communication, but because of the dispersion of readers and need for communication with the metropolitan centre, it was necessary to circulate the papers through print.²⁰ This mandated reading of papers continued until the 1940s at least.

Writing about *Transactions’* origins seventy years later, the Society’s President A.J.H. Goodwin stressed its continuity with the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, as many members of the new society had been contributors to the magazine. In addition, the printer (Saul Solomon) and publisher (JC Juta) remained the same, and “the format, type-face and general appearance of the two publications were all continued” (as can be seen in Figure 1, the title page of the first issue).²¹ This format, which was closely modelled on commercially-produced British periodicals, only changed after the transition to the Royal Society in 1908, when the format increased from octavo to quarto. The journal was relatively expensive to produce, with the first issue costing approximately £1 per page, for a total of 60 pages, and subscribers paying £2 per year.²² Printing costs doubled by the second year, and would remain a source of anxiety throughout the history of the Society.²³

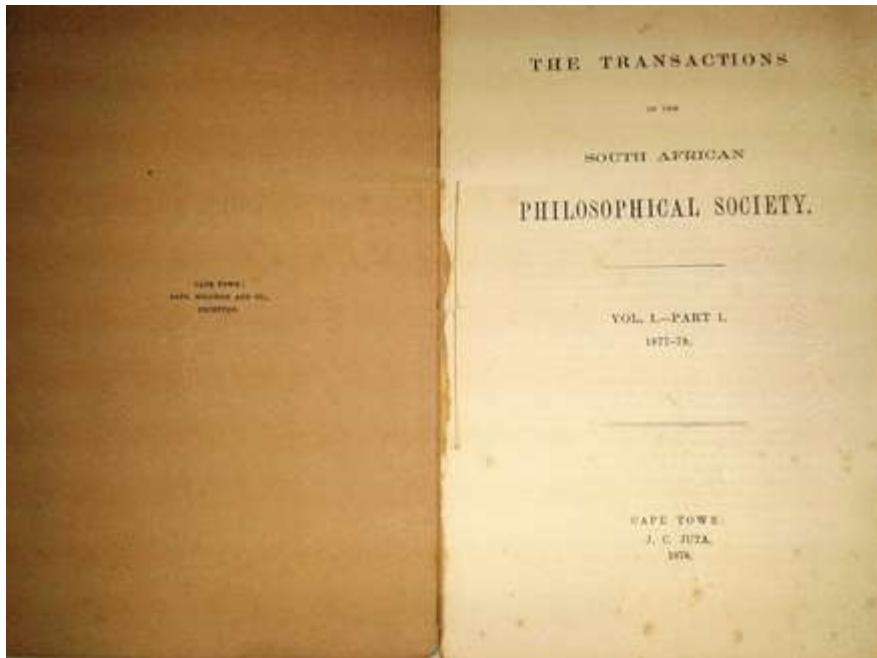


Figure 1. Title page of the first issue of *Transactions*, 1878. (Source: Wagener Africana Collection, Unisa Archives.)

The journal was also dependent on British technological expertise and circulation networks. This may be seen in the fact that *Transactions* was managed by the Society in Cape Town, but much of the printing was done 6,000 miles away, in Britain. After just a few issues in 1877 and 1878, the local printer and publisher, Saul Solomon and JC Juta, ended the contract, arguing that they “would be a serious loser by adhering to the arrangements under which (they) had agreed to print and issue the Society’s ‘Transactions’”.²⁴ The society experimented with other local printers during the 1880s, including WA Richards & Sons, Murray & St Leger and the Cape Times Printing Works, but Solomon was the largest, being the first (and for some time only) printer in South Africa to use steam-powered printing. Eventually, the Society decided that printing should move to London, for the purposes of “economy and despatch alike”²⁵ and to “insure ... speedy publication”.²⁶ Remarkable as it is to picture the draft manuscript being sent to Britain, typeset and printed, and then copies shipped back to the Cape, West Newman & Co of Hatton Garden, London, became the regular printers from 1895 until 1907 (see Figure 2), followed by a long-term contract with Neill & Co of Edinburgh. Although the society claimed there was a cost-saving purpose, the more likely reason for this unusual arrangement was the availability (or not) of technical expertise in South Africa. While West Newman & Co were predominantly chromo-lithographers, Neill & Co was one of Edinburgh’s major printing firms, with decades of experience

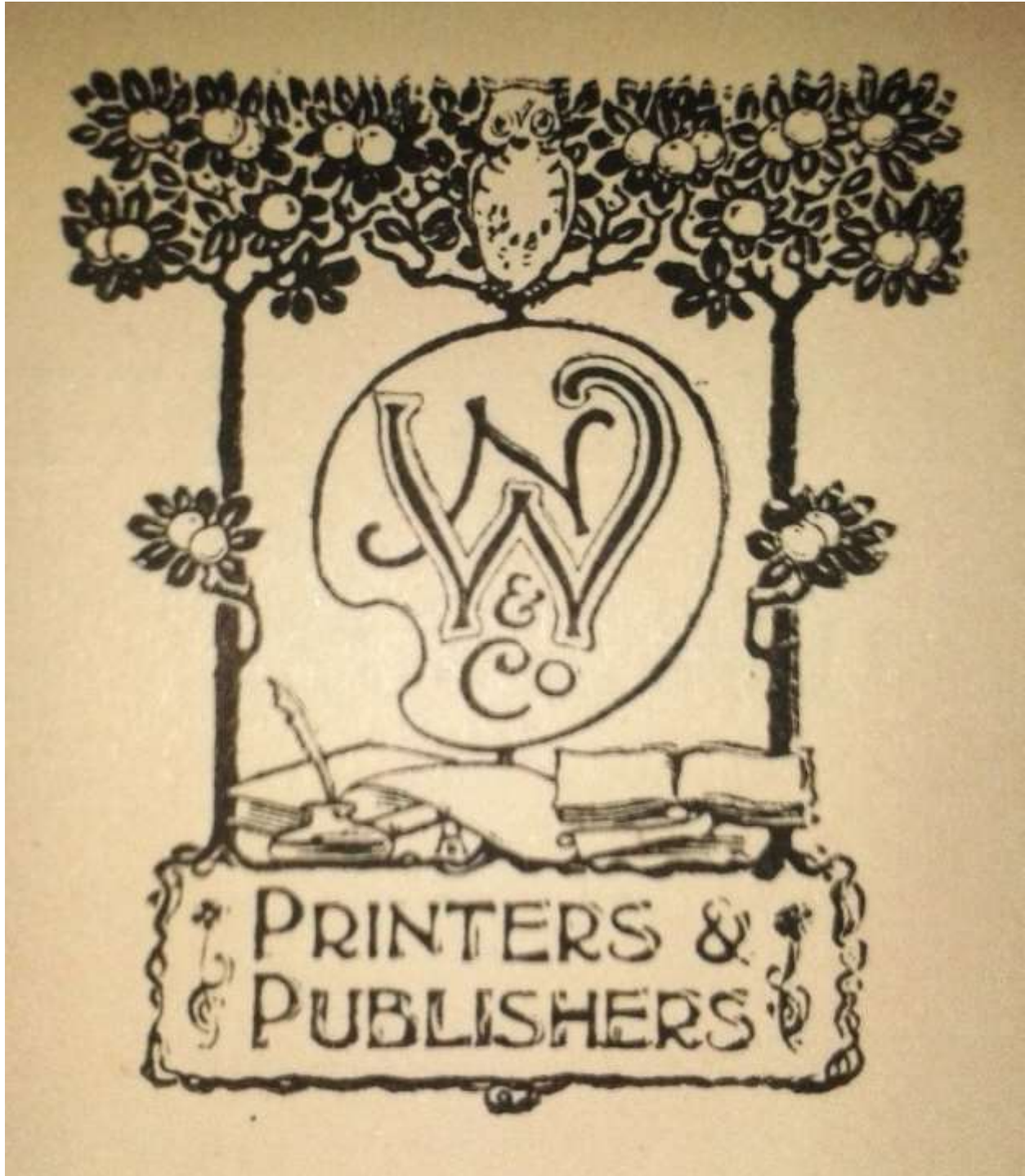


Figure 2. Printer's mark for West Newman & Co., 1902. (Source: Wagener Africana Collection, Unisa Archives.)

printing for government, the university, and learned societies.²⁷ This arrangement survived the Union of South Africa in 1910, in which self-rule devolved to the colonies. In fact, printing would only move back to South Africa in the mid-1950s.

As well as circulating news of European research, the *Transactions* sought to promote original research as well. In 1890, Louis Péringuey, President of the Society, admitted that “nothing new – I mean absolutely scientifically new – has yet come out of South Africa” and that local science had “followed, in tracks already beaten”. However, he believed that “in time to come we will also have among us investigators whose original discoveries when published in our Transactions will tend to make our Society what not only I, but also all of you wish it to be, i.e., a scientific Society which, without perhaps aspiring to equal or be considered on par with the older societies of England and the Continent will become a Chartered Society, certainly second to no other Colonial Societies, be they Indian, Canadian or Australian”.²⁸

In 1878, an article in the journal had specifically avoided “any reference to the civilizing effect which an overland telegraph [the subject of the article] would have upon Central Africa: the impulse which it would give to missionary enterprise, to mercantile adventure, and to the spirit of travels, needs but to be named. Nor have I made any allusion to the political effect which such an undertaking would have...”.²⁹ But by the end of the century, the role of knowledge in the “civilising mission” had become explicit, supporting the colonial government, as well as, in time, of the white settler government. Sir David Gill, Astronomer Royal, made this link explicitly when addressing the Society in 1903:

To the Colonist Science appeals, or should appeal, with a double force. It is not only a source of intellectual elevation and a high form of enjoyment to all who sufficiently interest themselves in its pursuit, but it also lies at the foundation of our civilization, and even of our existence. ... without the advantages of defence and inter-communication given to us by the applications of Science, the very existence of a scattered white population in South Africa would be impossible.³⁰

Transactions had both an intellectual and a social role, reflected in its content and its eclectic and often non-specialist readership. In terms of content, there was little trouble in sourcing sufficient material, and the early volumes of *Transactions* were full of observations on insectivorous plants, or rainfall or other aspects of natural history, as well as articles on the ethnology of local peoples. The applied sciences of engineering and medicine were also considered particularly useful in a context where mining soon became a source of wealth, and a variety of so-called tropical diseases were encountered. Authors brought specimens and objects to their presentations to the Society, and illustrations of these accompanied the published articles.

The journal reflected the interests of its readers, the educated middle classes – a group that soon included women as well as men, but remained racially exclusive for almost a century.³¹ In spite of its non-specialist audience, we cannot see *Transactions* as an attempt at popularising science. It was at first circulated only among subscribers, who were either Fellows or Members of the Society, an elite and exclusive group of “middle-class intellectuals and opinion-formers”.³² Their numbers grew from a founding base of 39, to 103 by the end of the first year, which is quite a considerable number given that fewer than fifty scientists were then employed in the country.³³ The largest potential audience was initially in Cape Town, but as the interior was further developed, readers and members came from all the settler centres. Within a decade, individual copies were being sold as well as institutional subscriptions, and the British printers retained copies for sale there until after World War II, suggesting that there was an international readership as well.³⁴

Another means of circulation was exchanges with other societies world-wide, to receive their publications and build local academic libraries. By 1885, nearly as many copies of *Transactions* were being sent out for exchange as were being received by subscribers. The journal and society thus became part of a global network of knowledge producers – what Pietsch calls “bridges across the Empire”³⁵ – while maintaining great pride in local achievements and knowledge. Dubow argues in this regard that, “Colonial intellectuals were animated by much the same concerns as their metropolitan peers, but their particular location in the chain of knowledge generation gave them a distinctive perspective. Ideas travelled easily through the Empire and penetrated to its furthestmost recesses with remarkable speed.”³⁶ These exchanges were not only with the British Empire, but eventually reached more than fifty countries. The exchange list fluctuated over the years, but was only seriously reviewed in 2001 when the University of Cape Town Library, which hosted the publications received, began to complain of space restrictions. It was also becoming expensive to post so many free copies of the journal around the world.³⁷

Taking a nineteenth century model into the twentieth century

A later President of the RSSA, S.M. Naudé argued in the 1960s that in the early years, “research in different fields was organized in order to overcome problems of immediate practical importance which the country had to face”.³⁸ *Transactions* was soon joined by a variety of more discipline-specific and focused journals, which were established by specialised learned societies, such as the *South African*

Journal of Geology from the Geological Society of South Africa (founded in 1895). In the early twentieth century, the local higher education institutions gained autonomy and grew more research-focused, with legislation in 1916 to create more teaching universities and in 1919 to establish a Research Grant Board to foster research. Funding from the Carnegie Foundation, among other donors, heralded the influence of American academic traditions. This was accompanied by a sharp rise in the number of scholarly journals being produced in South Africa. Dubow argues that these journals were “principally geared towards advancing the collective interests of the developing [scientific] profession”, but that they also served as “a clearing-house for new advances in clinical research, as well as offering an important outlet for scientific investigation of a broader nature.”³⁹

Perhaps the most influential of the new scientific periodicals was the *South African Journal of Science*, established in 1903 as the Proceedings of the Annual Meetings of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science. Its aim was: “To give a stronger impulse and a more systematic direction to Scientific enquiry; to promote the intercourse of Societies and Individuals interested in Science in different parts of South Africa....”⁴⁰ In 1909, the proceedings were adapted into a journal, to attract more members: “The express function of the Journal is therefore that of stimulating Science in South Africa”.⁴¹ It has been argued that this journal “soon became the prime focus of scientific endeavour in South Africa, surpassing in range and in volume – but not necessarily in quality – the offerings of other institutions such as the more exclusive Philosophical Society”.⁴² In spite of the obvious overlap in the missions of the two scientific associations, the SAAAS and the Royal Society of South Africa (as it had become) co-existed and cooperated amicably.

There is a variety of reasons why *Transactions* should have been surpassed by other scientific journals. The story related thus far reveals the difficulties of printing and sustaining a journal in the colonial period, but a journal created in a nineteenth century framework would require continual adaptation to survive the twentieth because of changing technologies, distribution methods, and journal conventions. Throughout the early-twentieth-century records of the Society, references may be found to delays in publication. Perhaps surprisingly, the disruption of the two world wars was minimal, with issues only slightly shorter than what had become the norm, and still being printed in and shipped from Britain – no shipping losses are reported at all. There was a reminder from the President in 1943, though, that Fellows and Members should attend meetings, “in spite of the difficulties entailed by black-out regulations, as failure to hold a meeting impedes the business of the Society, and retards publication”.⁴³

But the two main reasons for publication delays were editorial and financial difficulties. Indeed, costs and income would become a familiar lament in the reports of the Society as, even in the 1880s, subscriptions proved insufficient to cover mounting printing costs. Even after printing moved back to South Africa in 1955, to the Rustica Press in Cape Town, the production costs soon began rising again.⁴⁴

From an editorial perspective, *Transactions* had no lack of papers in the early years because it drew upon papers read at meetings of the Society. The practice of only publishing papers that had been presented to the Society proved difficult to sustain, however, especially as *Transactions* was a multi-disciplinary science journal in a context of increasing specialisation. Thus, in the mid-century, this requirement was relaxed, enabling Members or Fellows, or those recommended by Members or Fellows, to submit papers for consideration. This led to fluctuations in the number of suitable papers, with an over-abundance in certain years. In the 1970s, a formal editorial policy was first introduced to regulate submissions and their review. In 1972, Editor Alec Brown was responsible for drawing up a set of guidelines for authors, which have been expanded upon but not fundamentally altered since then.⁴⁵ Brown, a marine biologist and later President of the Society, was the first Editor to directly intervene in the policy and running of the journal in this way (previous editors had been more subservient to the executive committee). As late as 1996, the guidelines were amended to mention peer review by at least two referees for the first time, although this policy had been in practice since the 1960s. The ongoing editorial difficulties were considered by an Editorial Board in the 1990s, which was asked to examine the scope, format and niche of the journal to ensure its continued relevance. This led to changes to the editorial policy in the early 2000s, finally enabling non-Members to submit articles directly for consideration. The section of the statutes that dictated the presentation of papers at Society meetings was also finally deleted, some time after it had ceased to function in practice.

The 1972 guidelines for authors also reveal why the Society had years of struggle to make ends meet financially: like the Royal Society in London some decades earlier (as mentioned elsewhere in this special issue by Aileen Fyfe), the Society was having to respond to the apparently “heavy demand for the publication of papers of high academic standard in the Society’s *Transactions*”.⁴⁶ But as well as the global expansion of scientific research, the Society may have faced particular pressure from South African scientists due to the increasing isolation of South African academia, as will be further discussed in the next section. Almost every President’s report comments on the Editor’s “considerable efforts made in seeking financial aid” (1970) in an attempt “to find new ways of meeting rising publication

costs" (1971). As a journal run and funded by a Society rather than a publishing house, *Transactions* was dependent on its membership and had few other sources of income to subsidise its production. In 1981, the notes for authors were expanded to describe the required format for figures, and to remind authors that "photographs and other half-tone materials are costly to reproduce and should be avoided where at all possible".⁴⁷ Another addition in the 1990s was the introduction of page fees: "Authors will normally be expected to pay half the cost of publishing their contributions."⁴⁸ In the mid-twentieth century, a lifetime membership fee was introduced (£25 for fellows, or £15 for members) in a temporarily successful attempt to boost the income of the Society.

However, the Society was better off than many others in that it received grants from government almost every year throughout the twentieth century, as well as occasional printing grants from universities, and later from large corporations interested in sponsoring research. Moreover, *Transactions* was one of the small group of journals to receive funding from the Bureau for Scientific Publications in the late apartheid period. The 'Bureau journals' were an attempt to foster academic publication in South Africa and to make their products available to an international readership, but the experiment was not a success.⁴⁹ Indeed, the end of the direct government influence has largely been seen as positive, even if it resulted in less funding, and Pouris argues that "the termination of the government interference in the affairs of the journals had on average a beneficial effect on the impact factors of the journals", i.e. on their status and reputation.⁵⁰ After the demise of the Bureau, *Transactions* continued to receive some funding from government bodies, but by the mid-1990s it was running at a loss and proving increasingly difficult to sustain.

At the same time, in contrast to the over-supply of articles in the 1970s, this period saw a decline in submissions. By 1990, the Editor Peter Jackson was lamenting, "Original articles for the *Transactions* are drying up. I realize that most personal research work is normally offered to the individual's specialist journal, but surely there should be occasions when the author(s) would like to expose their efforts to a widespread group of top scientists of other disciplines? When this is the case may I request fellows and members to think primarily of the *Transactions*?"⁵¹ To encourage submissions, themed issues were introduced, as well as attracting more multi-disciplinary work. Jackson was the Editor from 1987, and took a very active role in shaping and managing the *Transactions*. He took on the editorship at the age of 69, and his successor later remembered that he "spent a considerable part of his remaining working life soliciting papers, corresponding with authors, correcting galley proofs and running the Journal more or

less single-handedly. He was, to my knowledge, the only editor of a general journal who carefully read each manuscript not only for language and grammar, but also for scientific content, irrespective of the subject-matter. The international standing of the *Transactions* attests to the quality of his work.”⁵² At the time, *Transactions* was ranked sixteenth in the world in its category of interdisciplinary journals.⁵³

This international reputation for quality persisted in spite of direct government funding, and the always-possible corollary of unwanted control and interference. However, it must be noted that there was an apparent disregard of the political situation in the pages of *Transactions*. This was the result of a deliberate decision, “unlike other societies in South Africa that have direct ties to government ... to maintain its non-political stance and to conduct its scientific life outside of politics”. Carruthers goes on to remark that, “There was, for example, no comment in the Society’s affairs on various changes in political parties in power, not even – after 1961 – what the title ‘Royal’ might imply in a republic without connections to any king or queen”.⁵⁴ Notably, the label of ‘royal’ was seen not as a link to an imperial heritage, but as a seal of excellence and credibility: “The Royal Society of South Africa is one of a number of Royal Societies in the world that uses the regal adjective more as an index of special quality than of loyal adherence to a particular form of earthly government.”⁵⁵

This distance from government and party politics was only reinforced by the statement that “the Society does not and cannot accept the principle of the exclusion of qualified scientists from its membership upon grounds of race” in December 1962 – at a time when there were no black members.⁵⁶ Indeed, a content analysis shows that the word “apartheid” does not feature in a single article before 1995 – yet this political influence was crucial in the development of science and journals in the later twentieth century.

The apartheid era and the rise of university presses⁵⁷

Research and its dissemination were affected by a variety of external factors, in particular changing political fortunes. After the Second World War, the university sector saw wide-scale restructuring, as the Nationalist government came to power in 1948, and then began to implement its apartheid policies in the area of education. There were great changes to the higher education sector at this time. For a start, there was formal segregation of the student body along racial lines. Then, following a commission of enquiry headed by Dr Edgar Brookes, the federal structure of the University of South Africa (Unisa) was

broken up, with the constituent parts being granted full university status. A small group of university presses also emerged in this period. While many of South Africa's scientific periodicals were edited by learned societies or university departments, the role of publisher was often taken on by the university presses, each of which was responsible for journals in addition to books and service publications like inaugural lectures. While scholarly attention has been paid to the role of learned societies and commercial publishers in producing scientific journals, far less attention has been paid to such university presses' journals publishing programmes.

For example, Witwatersrand University Press, founded in 1922, published the well-respected *Bantu Studies* (later *African Studies*) from its inception, as well as the *South African Journal of Medical Science* (founded in 1935 by the Medical Graduates Association) and *English Studies in Africa* (from 1958). Secondly, the University of Natal Press (UNP) was established in the late 1940s, when the University received its charter. This press was closely associated with the publication of the interdisciplinary journal *Theoria*, "serving as a record of scholarship and criticism within the University, while also welcoming contributions from outside, nationally and internationally".⁵⁸ Approaches were later made to UNP to publish other journals, such as the *Journal of Behavioural Sciences* in 1976. While the Press was amenable to such requests (although concerned about its capacity and resources), the Principal rejected the idea, instructing the Press to concentrate on books.⁵⁹

The third university press was established at the University of South Africa (Unisa) in 1956. This journals programme was both more ambitious and better funded from the start – and their publishing programme serves as a good exemplar to examine university press involvement in journals publishing. Unisa's role was unique, in that it was designated a distance education institution, operating largely through correspondence, and it was allowed to admit both black and white students. It was also intended to be a bilingual institution, offering tuition in both English and Afrikaans. Unisa started publishing departmental journals soon after setting up a publishing programme in 1956, with a focus on journals that "speak to the student".⁶⁰ One of the earliest was the journal *Mousaion*, in the field of library science, established by the controversial Belgian academic Hermann de Vleeschauer. It was followed by a few faculty-wide journals – *Codicillus* (Law) and *Theologica Evangelica* (Theology) – as well as departmental journals that reflected the world-wide trend of increasing disciplinary specialisation, such as *De Arte* (History of Art), *Dynamica* (Business Economics), *Unisa English Studies* (English), *Limi* (Bantu Languages) and *Mercurius* (Economics). In the 1960s and 1970s, the programme was extended



Figure 3. A Unisa Press publicity photograph from the early 1970s, showing a selection of journals. (Source: Unisa Press archives.)

with more departmental journals, from History, Musicology, Semitics, Public Administration and Political Science, Education, Communication and Psychology.⁶¹ The Latinate titles – such as *Musicus*, *Politeia* and *Theologia Evangelica* – were in line with the naming of book series at the time, which included *Manualia* and *Documenta*, and may have been intended to avoid the problem of bilingual titles. Figure 3 shows a selection of the journals from the early 1970s. The journals were managed editorially by academics in these departments, and largely featured articles by local researchers. In fact, it may be argued that Unisa’s early journals publishing was a form of ‘in-house’ publishing for its staff, and that this is why it was subsidised. In addition, the journals policy advocated that “[a]ny journal produced by the University should in the first place be aimed at University students ... i.e. purely student-oriented although no prescribed study material may be included....”⁶² In other words, the publishing of academic journals by university presses was for some time seen as a support function for staff and students, rather than a significant platform for research.

With this function in mind, a report on Unisa journals lists 12 journals that were sent to students free of charge in the 1970s, with large print runs ranging between 650 and 7 000.⁶³ Unlike most publishing houses in South Africa (and indeed elsewhere), the printing was all carried out in-house, at Unisa’s in-house printing presses, as were most other production functions. The journals were considered

attractive for the time and produced by in-house design staff, but they were clearly aimed at a student audience – as can be seen by their cover designs. One student remembers:

Like all students registered for 'English' at UNISA, twice annually I received an unsolicited copy of *Unisa English Studies: Journal of the Department of English*. This journal was not required reading for undergraduates, and therefore I summarily ignored it. I do not recall the first time I browsed through a copy, but at some point, I must have done so, read a paragraph or two, and decided it was not worth the effort. Either that or the garish colours and awful jacket design kept me from paying due attention to the contents.⁶⁴

This paratext, as will be seen, was only changed once the purpose and audience of the journals shifted as well. It is remarkable that the university put so much money into supporting these journals, which were aimed at students but not apparently widely read. What is striking about these journals, and indeed about their more scholarly counterparts being produced by other universities and learned societies, is how insular they were – in terms of content, authorship and readership – a factor that may in part be attributed to the increasing isolation of apartheid South Africa. A 1978 editorial from the UNP journal *Theoria* described the problems of “the distance separating us from larger centres of the academic world (a distance which widens as this country becomes more isolated)” as well as “the difficulty of interpreting laws of censorship and the possible muzzling of contributors” and the lack of material resources for publication.⁶⁵ A number of scholars have pointed out that the legislative culture of the apartheid era, the academic boycott and a decline in government spending on academic journals led to a culture of insularity and even mediocrity. They point to the poor marketing efforts, low international subscriptions, and few international authors of the majority of South African journals at the time of the democratic transition in 1994.⁶⁶ Distribution was local for the most part, or regional at best, with only a small international readership. While there was little direct censorship of academic journals, many academics practised a form of self-censorship, avoiding potentially controversial research topics. Scholars conclude that, at this time, “Scientific publishing in South Africa [was] dominated by direct and indirect government intervention” and that “South African journals [were], in the main, introspective. They [dealt] with regional topics written by local authors that [were] reviewed and read by regional audiences.”⁶⁷ The academic boycott led (at least temporarily) to a surge in the number of such locally produced and circulated journals, which were mostly published on an ad hoc basis by university departments or by the nascent university presses.

Another significant constraint, mentioned in the editorial above, relates to resources. A journals publishing programme is a costly exercise. As external funding declined in the high apartheid period of the 1970s and 1980s and with publishers coming under increasing pressure to be self-sustaining and to produce an income from their publishing programme, journals were sometimes dropped from publishing lists. This would lead, among other consequences, to the decision by WUP to cease publication of the *South African Journal of Medical Science* in 1976, and in the mid-1990s, to sign *African Studies* over to a commercial publisher. At around the same time, *English Studies in Africa* took over its own production, and later moved to the stable of Unisa Press journals. With the greater cushion of a well-resourced institution and a clear support role for a huge student body, Unisa Press was thus able to attract journals that were no longer subsidised by other educational institutions or societies. It became the home for some important South African journals, especially in the humanities and social sciences. This happened at a time when political changes coincided with technological changes that have completely altered the complexion of journals publishing in South Africa.

New international models

A key change in journals publishing in South Africa came about because of two converging factors: the growing internationalisation of the academic audience for journals, and the introduction of technology to make articles widely available at a low cost. This affected both the *Transactions* and the Unisa Press journals. By the time of the democratic transition in South Africa, Unisa Press was responsible for around 20 journals, a number which rose in the post-apartheid era to around 30 in 2005. A 2007 policy document explained that the Press “solely or jointly, publishes or manages certain aspects of the publication of a number of journals. These vary in management structure, number of issues published each year, readership levels, quality of content and in other respects. In addition, the journals require varying levels of financial and other support from Unisa Press.”⁶⁸ Unisa Press underwrote production costs for most of the journals in its fold, apart from a few Society journals that contributed to their costs through subscription income. But it kept costs low through in-house layout and printing, as well as distribution. This made sense when the journals were primarily distributed to students, mostly free of charge, but it became less tenable as the journals became more professional vehicles for research that were aimed at a wider audience. The need for a change in the operational management of the journals was recognised in 2007:

The list has grown without a systematic attempt at controlling for quality, at ensuring that titles do not overlap or compete, or at marketing the titles to attract subscriptions and submissions – indeed, the journals programme has been a loss-making one and has continued without analysis or planning for some years now. The journals are heavily subsidised, yet there is little understanding of the costs involved in their production, and the mechanisms for producing them are cumbersome and not in line with international practices.⁶⁹

With the introduction of more professional publishing managers from the 1990s, this picture shifted, but with bureaucratic slowness. Improvements have since been made in the tracking of journals, stricter regulations (e.g. around page limits and the number of issues per year), better costing, and improved distribution through the use of an external distributor. Journals were no longer provided free of charge to students, and so print runs could also be rationalised. But distribution and marketing have remained a problem, and an innovative solution was only found in the early 2000s.

While previously, South African journals had provided a relatively safe platform for local academics to publish, without intense global competition, now they actively sought to improve the quality and range of submissions, and to solicit papers from authors based in other countries. Changing editorial policies, with expanded editorial boards and firmer guidelines for peer review, may be seen as part of an attempt to attract authors from a wider, international, pool, and to present South Africa as part of the international research community. An editorial in *Critical Arts* in 2009 (a journal that had recently joined the Unisa Press stable) explained how the journal aimed to “locate ourselves in the relationship between the South–North nexus, positioning ourselves as ‘Africa in the global world’, rather than simply being ‘African’.”⁷⁰

The growing international focus may also be seen in the shifts in the paratext and packaging of the journals. To begin with, the journals were originally mostly A5 size (148 mm x 210 mm), with relatively simple, text-heavy covers. Some small cosmetic changes occurred over the years, but a more fundamental redesign may be seen after about 2000, with a shift to slightly larger trim sizes, at a conventional B5 size (174 mm x 248 mm), and full-colour covers usually with photographs or illustrations. The journal *Kleio*'s redesign was more radical than with many others as it included a name change, to the *African Historical Review*.

The Royal Society of South Africa's *Transactions* has also been reoriented to the international community. It underwent very few packaging changes for nearly the full twentieth century, from 1908 until the late 1990s, with just slight modifications to the typography after 1952, and minor changes such

as the inclusion of abstracts and details of authors. The introduction in 2000 of a “a new, more modern and attractive” A4 format was a major change, explicitly intended as “a substantial rejuvenation of the *Transactions*, better to fulfil its important role in South African as well as world science”.⁷¹ In 2006, its editor could boast: “The *Transactions* are now listed as a peer-reviewed journal in the world’s pre-eminent listing of journals, the ISI Online list.”⁷² This listing was important for credibility, but also had a direct effect on the attraction of sufficient authors and submissions, as the editor went on to note: “It is hoped that as a result of reinstatement on the lists, more authors will publish in the journal, so that it can maintain its reputation as one of South Africa’s premier multidisciplinary scientific journals”.⁷³ The attention paid to the ISI citation index also shows the increasing influence of the scientometric paradigm, in South Africa as much as elsewhere, and an attempt to re-insert local scholarship into the global arena.

Another sign of following new international models was the adoption of digital technologies. The Unisa Press journals moved online relatively early for South African journals, with correspondence indicating experiments with electronic delivery from around 1995, appropriately starting with articles from the media studies journal *Communicatio*.⁷⁴ The majority of journals were published in a dual format (print and online) from 2001, after an agreement was signed with Sabinet as part of the South African e-journals project. While this has been a positive step forward, one of the results is that very little digitisation of articles from before 2001 has yet taken place, and these are still difficult, if not impossible, to locate online. Unisa Press is still busy with a full digitisation project for its journals archive.

The *Transactions* moved to an electronic format in 2004. At first, the plan was to produce the journal online only, with Sabinet, although the Society’s Council recognised internet access was not sufficiently widespread to be the only option, and suggested that: “Those members who do not have access to the Internet, may however, request a hard copy, digitally photocopied, or burnt onto a compact disc.”⁷⁵ But even this policy was not sustained in the face of a general reluctance to accept electronic journals as being equivalent to their print counterparts at the time. The journal now also has a dual production mode, and is able to reach a wider group of subscribers and readers. But a more complete response to the growing internationalisation of journal audiences has only arisen with the possibility of co-publishing with international publishers.

With journals struggling to stay afloat by the mid-1990s, foreign commercial publishers began looking for possible acquisitions or partnerships in South Africa, and a number of South African journals started negotiations with commercial publishing companies such as Elsevier, Sage and Blackwell. These were not all successful, as “Some of the publishers were apparently ‘intrigued’ by the local journals”, but “none could then see a market for a regional southern publication which would need to be subscribed to and read in the North to ensure its viability ... the market for ‘regional’ journals had yet to be constituted via the electronically mediated information economy still on the horizon”.⁷⁶ Some local publishers sold their journals at this time, accepting the terms of the commercial multinationals. As mentioned, in 1998 WUP signed *African Studies* over to Carfax. UNP’s *Theoria* was taken on by a commercial academic publisher, and since 1997, the journal has been published by Berghahn Books, although it still makes reference in publicity materials to being “based in South Africa”.⁷⁷

In contrast, Unisa Press chose to maintain a journals programme, opting instead for a co-publishing agreement with a commercial European publisher. When representatives of Carfax (later part of Routledge and then acquired by Taylor & Francis) first visited South Africa in the late 1990s, their motives were viewed with some suspicion. The visit, organised by Human Sciences Research Council academics Abebe Zegeye and Robert Kriger, was seen as predatory and potentially threatening to local knowledge production. There was a fear that local intellectual property would move to foreign ownership (although “when it is in local hands, those local publishers imagine their readers as being from outside the continent”⁷⁸) and that these ownership rights would be used to make editorial changes behind the scenes. Local libraries feared a renewed serials crisis, with rising costs and a loss of access to South African research results. But after a series of negotiations and some compromises (and a last-minute attempt from within Unisa to derail the process), an agreement was signed in 2006 between Unisa Press and Routledge (now an imprint of Taylor & Francis) with a pilot group of 11 journals. With its ongoing struggle to remain financially viable, *Transactions* joined the co-publishing stable in 2010.

It could be argued that the co-publishing agreement constitutes a re-colonisation of South African knowledge production, but it can also be seen as an innovative strategy for positioning local research in a global context. This is mainly because the agreement deliberately attempts to provide some measure of equality between the partners. Roles are clearly delineated, and the partnership aims to improve the visibility and accessibility of the journals while maintaining affordability for scholars on the African continent: “Unisa Press will publish an African print version (defined as the sub-Saharan African

region) ... [which] will be significantly cheaper for subscribers.”⁷⁹ Dr David Green, Global Journals Publishing Director for Taylor & Francis, called it “an extremely exciting partnership”, arguing, “Having worked with South African colleagues for over a decade, we are delighted to be part of a major step forward in reintegrating African scholarship into the global academic community”.⁸⁰

The benefits of the agreement relate to the sharing of resources, while some editorial independence is retained. The editor of *Critical Arts* appreciates the model of “strategic business partnerships which build capacity, permit wider dissemination, and identify income streams which should result in viability”.⁸¹ This, in theory at least, should enable the journals to have the best of both worlds: to retain their regional identities, while building an international profile. A tangible benefit has been an increase in subscriptions and thus in visibility of the journals. This has also led to a rise in international status. Zegeye and Vambe, while arguing for the location of African knowledge in African hands, acknowledge the importance of good marketing platforms for local knowledge, and Taylor & Francis provides this infrastructural support for the journals.⁸² Some of the original fears have been allayed through the differential pricing for African institutions. But the fairness of the co-publishing arrangement, and the unequal power relations between publishing industries which it seeks to obscure, can be called into question if one considers how costly it has been for Unisa Press to underwrite many of the costs associated with co-publishing. The arrangement has also accelerated the consolidation of journals publishing under a commercial publishing model, while government attempts to introduce an open access alternative remain less attractive to the majority of learned societies editing journals.

Unlike other countries, such as the United States, where university presses have formed consortia to share the costs of publishing journals, Unisa Press has remained the only South African university press with a journals publishing programme. In part, this may be linked to the University’s stronger subvention and its perception of journals as having a teaching or student support function. The Press now publishes around 50 journals, which is approximately 15% of the local journals market – and so changes at Unisa Press now affect a significant portion of South Africa’s journals market.

Conclusion

This paper tracks the development of South African journals publishing through three key periods: a colonial period, in which South Africa became part of an “Empire of Scholars”; a shift to intellectual

isolation during the apartheid period; and a return to an international community in the twenty-first century. The early scientific journals were modelled on British exemplars, but this was no simple centre/periphery dichotomy, as is shown by the printing of the journal in Britain, the mobility of scientists and authors, and the world-wide exchanges of journals. A great deal of original research was published, in addition to news and reports from the metropolitan capitals, so there was clearly a two-way (or perhaps multiple) circulation of knowledge within the imperial community of scholars and educated readers. This continued into the twentieth century, apparently unaffected by the Union and self-rule.

But political shifts in the middle of the century did have a greater effect. Pietsch argues that the “Empire of Scholars” created by imperial British networks of influence had largely eroded by the 1960s, and this is certainly reflected in South Africa, which became increasingly isolated in the apartheid years.⁸³ An interesting signal of this was the shift to local printing in the mid-1950s. However, this does not necessarily mean that regional journals deviated much from the patterns of British journals, but rather that some of these changes were experienced somewhat later. In fact, while the specific political circumstances of the mid-twentieth century changed – or at least delayed – the dynamics of journals publishing for a time, there now seems to have been a return to global models, and especially the recent trends towards commercialisation and consolidation. As a result, the profit motive has only recently emerged as a key driving force behind journals publishing in South Africa. Rather, the focus previously has been on sustainability (and even bare survival).

In the twentieth century, university presses became the key publishers of scholarly journals in South Africa – but it could be argued that not all of these were research journals, strictly speaking, until the 1990s. This view of the university press as the key agent for journals publishing is an unusual one in the historiography of scientific periodicals and indeed of scholarly publishing more generally. For instance, Houghton does not include university presses in his categorisation of scientific periodical publishing,⁸⁴ while the history of Oxford University Press hardly mentions the publishing of journals at all, although it acknowledges that “OUP failed to follow other publishers in extending its journal publishing” in the 1960s.⁸⁵ The reasons given – lack of editorial control, the difficult logistics of distribution, and the issue of sourcing reasonably priced, deadline-driven printing – were all experienced in South Africa, but perhaps due to the lack of other resources to maintain journals and the shrinkage of publishing

platforms for local academics in the isolation era, these were seen as subordinate to the continued production of local journals.

Going forward, the ongoing relevance, readership and viability of regional academic journals will need to be considered. From the experiences of South African journals and publishers, it seems that part of the way forward is to attempt to attract a wider audience, while maintaining the scholarly standards expected by the academic community. Open access is still seen as an experimental option, and seems unlikely to have a significant effect on local journals while the government policy focuses on institutional repositories. But there remains an ongoing tension between the local and the international, as indigenous knowledge is now being promoted at the same time as the importance of participating in global knowledge production. It remains to be seen whether partnerships, such as the co-publishing arrangement described here, will overcome or exacerbate such tensions.

Captions

Figure 1: Title page of the first issue of *Transactions*, 1878 (Source: Internet Archive)

Figure 2: Contents page of *Transactions*, 1905, showing printer's mark from West Newman (Source: Internet Archive)

Figure 3: A Unisa Press publicity photograph from the early 1970s, showing a selection of journals (Source: Unisa Press archives)

Notes

¹ S. Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa, 1820–2000*, p. 14 (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2006).

² This periodisation merges the divisions identified by Tamson Pietsch: (i) 1802-80, the development of settler universities; (ii) 1880-1914, imperial expansion; (iii) 1900-39, networks; and (iv) 1919-60s, erosion. These have been extended in this paper into the twenty-first century. See T. Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1850-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

³ This paper does not examine Dutch colonial scholarship, because of the focus on local scientific journals and print culture – the first printing presses in South Africa arrived only at the end of the Dutch colonial era, in the late 1790s.

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- ⁷ Royal Society of South Africa. n.d. Available online: http://www.royalsocietysa.org.za/?page_id=122 (accessed 2 February 2015).
- ⁸ Dubow 2006, p. 3.
- ⁹ A.J. Meadows, ed. *Development of Science Publishing in Europe* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1980).
- ¹⁰ Dubow 2006, p. 44.
- ¹¹ Dubow 2006, p. 71.
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- ¹⁷ S.S. Hough, 'Presidential address', *Transactions* 2(1) (1910), p. 419.
- ¹⁸ Dubow 2006, p. 119.
- ¹⁹ An early author, J.H. Bowker, complains of just this lack of attribution for one of his articles in the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, in 'Other Days in South Africa', *Transactions of the South African Philosophical Society* 3(2) (1881), p. 73.
- ²⁰ On the importance of orality, see J. Secord, 'How scientific conversation became shop talk', in A. Fyfe & B. Lightman (eds), *Science in the Marketplace*, p. 26 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
- ²¹ Goodwin 1955, p. iv.
- ²² A.J.H. Goodwin, 'Preface', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa* 35(1) (1955), p. iii.
- ²³ 'Financial report of the treasurer of the year 1878', *Transactions of the South African Philosophical Society* 1(3) (1878), p. xxxiv.
- ²⁴ 'Report on proceedings of the South African Philosophical Society', *Transactions of the South African Philosophical Society* 2(1) (1879), pp. xx–xxi.
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- ²⁸ L. Peringuey, 'Annual Address to the Members of the South African Philosophical Society', *Transactions of the South African Philosophical Society* 8(1) (1890), pp. xv–xvi.
- ²⁹ Mr Siveright, 'A Trans-African telegraph', *Transactions of the South African Philosophical Society* 1(2) (1878), p. 10.
- ³⁰ D. Gill, *Report of South African Association for the Advancement of Science* p. 20 (Cape Town, 1903).
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- ³² Dubow 2006, p. 73.
- ³³ Dubow 1995, p. 34.
- ³⁴ 'Report on proceedings of SA Philosophical Society', *Transactions of the South African Philosophical Society* 3(1) (1881), p. xvi.
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- ³⁶ Dubow 2006, p. 99.

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- ³⁹ Dubow 1995, p. 141.
- ⁴⁰ *Proceedings of the Annual Meetings of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science* 1 (1903), p. 26.
- ⁴¹ *South African Journal of Science* 6 (1909), p. xxv.
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- ⁴⁵ Carruthers 2008, p. 24.
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- ⁴⁷ Notes for Authors, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa* 1981.
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- ⁵³ *South African Journal of Science* 82 (1986), p. 401.
- ⁵⁴ Carruthers 2008, p. 20.
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- ⁸⁴ Houghton 1975.
- ⁸⁵ C.S. Nicholls, 'Oxford University Press, 1945–1970' *History of Oxford University Press: Volume III: 1896 to 1970*, edited by Wm Roger Louis, p. 101 (Oxford: OUP, 2013).