

Is Publication in “Minor” Journals  
Tantamount to Burial?

September 16, 1970

Recently<sup>1</sup> W.A. Waters of Oxford University claimed that publishing a paper in a “minor specialist journal” is effectively the same as burying the information it contains. In a reply<sup>2</sup> reprinted below, I took issue with this commonly held view, with the proviso that the minor journal in question is covered in *Current Contents*,<sup>®</sup> or other current awareness services or publications.

As noted in my letter, and as many readers have told us, the role played by *Current Contents* in dissemination of reprints these days is substantial. Many readers may not appreciate how substantial it can be. Recently I was reminded of CC<sup>®</sup>'s role in international scientific communication by a scientist who had authored a series of four papers. CC inadvertently omitted the title of one paper of the series. For each of the three papers which was listed in *Current Contents* the author received about 500 reprint requests. For the unlisted paper, he received about 100. As soon as CC corrected the omission, the reprint requests for the article in question surged to the normal level.

**Science publication**

SIR,—May I respectfully suggest that contrary to Waters' statement (*Chem.*

*Brit.* 1968, 4, 187) there is very good evidence that publication in so-called minor journals is not tantamount to burial, provided the journal in question is listed in *Current Contents* or some other current awareness publication such as *Current Chemical Papers*. It is precisely because many readers will not buy a relatively expensive but small group of larger journals that they also have begun to depend upon such services.

It can also be shown by two methods that it really makes very little difference in which journal one publishes his *magnum opus* these days. One is by counting the number of reprint requests; the other is through cited references. We have substantial evidence of the effect of *Current Contents* on reprint requests. In addition, a study of data in the *Science Citation Index*,<sup>®</sup> has shown that the citation rates do not vary much in chemical journals. The number of times a journal is cited depends primarily on the number of articles it publishes. The number of times an article is cited depends very much on quality, impact, and other factors.

Historically the proliferation of new journals has been due to at least five major causes; (1) undue delay in publication by established journals; (2) selection policies which force the 'out' group to establish initially 'minor' journals which quickly grow into major journals as, e.g. *J. heterocyclic Chem.*; (3) growth of new specialities which are not

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easily accommodated in the existing scope of growth of science in general.  
of established journals; (4) nationalistic  
or other political reasons which have  
little bearing on scientific merit; (5) the

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1. Waters, W.A. Information burial and retrieval. [A letter to the editor of] *Chemistry in Britain* 4(4): 187 (April 1968).
2. Garfield, E. Science publication. [A letter to the editor of] *Chemistry in Britain* 5(1): 37 (January 1969).