

To the Editor, *The Mathematical Gazette*

DEAR SIR,

May I draw attention to a trend in Mathematical Examinations at A and S Levels? Over the years there has been a steady increase in Calculus and Applied Mathematics, with a corresponding decrease in Pure Mathematics.

This may well be sound practice for the majority of boys, but it brings severe drawbacks for the ablest mathematicians. There is now little space for testing Algebra, and sometimes none for testing pure geometry. Yet these two subjects are the best training ground for real scholars.

Would it not be possible to cater for both schools of thought? For instance, at A level, papers 1, 2, 3 on Calculus, Pure, Applied could be compulsory: whilst paper 4 gave a choice 4a Calculus and Applied or 4b Pure Maths.

The most promising boys are I believe suffering under the present arrangement. They are few in numbers, but important in the future of the country.

Yours faithfully, R. M. CAREY

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To the Editor of *The Mathematical Gazette*

DEAR SIR,

For the benefit of readers of the Association's "Second report on the teaching of arithmetic in schools" I append comments on three of its historical statements. Others also, particularly page 28, require qualifying but too much space would be required.

Page 20, second paragraph, states "Decimal fractions may be said to have been invented in the sixteenth century A.D. by Christoff Rudolff but his work does not appear to have been appreciated. Fifty-five years later, in 1585, Stevin published an account ..." This is grossly misleading. It is well known that Smith's contention that Rudolff invented decimals [1] arises from his misconception as to the meaning of the word "inventor" [2]. Most historians [3] regard Stevin as the inventor of decimals.

Page 27, third paragraph, states "In 1585 the Dutchman Simon Stevin published a book to popularise decimals and he used two notations. The number 123.456 he wrote as

(i) $123'4''5'''6''''$

or

(ii) $123(0)4(1)5(2)6(3).$ '

Notation (ii) is substantially correct, except that Stevin enclosed his exponents in complete circles instead of parentheses, but notation (i) although similar to that used transitionally by a few subsequent writers was never used by Stevin in any of his published works [4]. It is true that Stevin used the words "primes", "seconds", "thirds" etc., in respect