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British National Committee for the History of Science, Medicine and Technology

Catalogue of the correspondence of

SIR BERNARD AUGUSTUS KEEN, F.R.S.

(1890 - 1981)

Compiled by:

Jeannine Alton and Peter Harper

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PROVENANCE

The material was received from Sir Charles Pereira, author of the Royal Society Memoir of Keen (Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society, 28, 1982). A copy of the Memoir, and of information from Sir Charles about the interest of the papers and about the location of other material, are included as Item 1.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Much of Keen's career as an agricultural scientist was spent abroad on secondment to various institutes, notably in India and Africa. As a consequence of this peripatetic life, few personal records survive.

The chief interest of the collection is in Item 2, which consists of correspondence exchanged October-December 1931 with Sir Daniel Hall, then Director of the John Innes Horticultural Institute. The letters relate to the setting up of the Agricultural Research Council and the offer to Keen of the position of Secretary.

LOCATIONS OF FURTHER MATERIAL

Keen's autobiographical notes, published papers, and five volumes of diaries of overseas travels, are held at the Royal Society, London.

Keen's collection of old prints and advertisements for early steam-power agricultural equipment, currently in the care of Sir Charles Pereira FRS, will be deposited in the Library of the National Institute of Agricultural Engineering, Silsoe.

A little personal material remains in family hands.

1. Memoir of Keen, by Sir Charles Pereira FRS (Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society, 28, 1982).

Included here is correspondence from Pereira, 1982, on the nature and interest of the papers and on the location of further material.

A note on Keen's work as Director of the East African Agriculture and Forestry Research Organisation, published on his retirement in 1954, appears in Item 3.

2. Correspondence with Sir Daniel Hall, 1931

The correspondence, exchanged when Keen was approaching the end of his secondment to the Imperial Institute of Agricultural Research, Bihar, relates to the setting-up of the 'Council of Agricultural Research' (later The Agricultural Research Council). Hall's letter of 6 September outlines the proposed scope of the Council and the duties of its Secretary and asks 'Does this position appeal to you?' Keen's letter of reply, dated 3 October, gives an account of his own career plans.

Also included is a letter from Hall, 30 December, commenting on Keen's report on Indian agriculture.

Hall's letter of 6 September bears marginal scorings by Sir Charles Pereira, who refers to the correspondence in his Memoir, p.211.

3. Correspondence 1954

Letters of farewell from and to Keen on his retirement from East Africa and return to Britain.

Includes press-cutting of article 'Sir Bernard Keen retires'.

Keen's letter of 11 November to Sir Vincent Glenday describes the 'very complicated distribution of my effects', which explains the paucity of surviving records.

4. Correspondence from Sir John Russell, 1962, 1963

Mainly re Russell's history of agricultural science in Britain, but also recalling Keen's appointment at Rothamsted (1913) and Rutherford's praise of his book The physical properties of the soil (1931).

5. Letter from G.D.H. Bell, on Keen's retirement as Editor, Journal of Agricultural Science, 1965 (Keen had served since 1924).

6. Letter of condolence, from Royal Meteorological Society, 1981.

(Keen had been President 1938 and 1939.)