



Joseph and Dorothy Needham, 1924.

Cambridge University Archives, Biochemistry
Department Photograph Albums.

Bride and prejudice: marriage

Joseph Needham and Dorothy Needham (nee Moyle) – two biochemists at the Cambridge Biochemical Laboratories who married in 1924.

In the case of the Needhams, marriage consolidated an existing intellectual partnership, as colleagues who had researched together for three years prior to their wedding. The couple held relatively bohemian views, reflected in the *ménage à trois* that they would later enter into with Dorothy's PhD student Gwei Djen Lu.

Several of those who achieved notable success in their fields like **Dorothy Needham** (1896-1987), Muriel Wheldale and **Ida Smedley** married their laboratory collaborators or co-workers. This suggests a degree of companionability and mutual respect existed within these research teams, not least because these women often continued to publish independently after marriage. But marriage could also exclude women from opportunities in scientific research. Dorothy Needham encountered this when she was overlooked for funding by the President of the Royal Society, who felt married women had no need of an independent income.

Moreover, marriage ended the careers of many women; a pattern that is difficult to document. Another consequence could be a change in perception of the women scientist's role. Mrs Rosenheim (King's College London) initially continued to present and publish papers after her marriage to fellow-biochemist Otto in 1910. Indeed, the following year it was her enquiry that prompted the Biochemical Club to consider the membership status of women. Nevertheless, having published prolifically both independently and in collaboration with Otto Rosenheim, her later research did not bring her personal recognition.

In 1922, the Beit Fellow Trustees conducted a survey on the destination of its first 50 award-holders. It categorised four of those it surveyed as 'Married (Women Fellows)'; a designation that suggests a primary identification with marital status rather than a specified career.¹ There was no comparable category for 'Married Men Fellows'. Instead, it seems marriage was most likely to terminate, or at least compromise, the careers of those women who married.

¹ 'Beit Memorial Fellowships: New Regulations', *The Times* (Wednesday 19 April 1922), p. 9.