



Frederick Gowland Hopkins, c. 1943.

Cambridge University Archives,
Biochemistry Department Photograph
Albums.

Hopkins's protégé

A characterful portrait of **Frederick Gowland Hopkins** (1861-1947), taken towards the end of his life in c. 1943. It was Hopkins who mentored Stephenson at a critical period in her career after 1919.

From 1919, Stephenson worked on vitamins and nutrition with Hopkins at Cambridge. It was on his advice that she switched to bacterial metabolism. According to the historian Robert Kohler, this fitted with Hopkins's grand schema for 'general biochemistry' and provided a ready-made niche for Stephenson to 'push beyond the limits of the biochemical tradition'. Equally, Kohler has also suggests that 'the substance that Stephenson gave to the new field... was distinctly her own'.¹

The acknowledgements to Stephenson's *Bacterial Metabolism* (1930) recorded her debt of gratitude to Hopkins, at whose suggestion, she claimed, 'the book was written and to whose influence alone I owe the incentive to think on biochemical matters'.²

Stephenson's biographers, however, have also noted that she was an energetic independent investigator, who according to Robertson 'took her fair share in the hard work of the subject'.³

By the 1940s, any deference Stephenson felt for Hopkins appears to have transmuted into a mutual respect. Her obituarist, D.D. Woods noted in 1950 that whilst her admiration for 'Hoppy' remained undiminished, she had become a 'great standby to Hopkins in the running of his department, in which she had by then become a leading personality'.⁴

¹ Robert Kohler, 'Innovation in Normal Science: Bacterial Physiology', *Isis* **76** (1985), pp. 166-167.

² Marlene F. Rayner-Canham and Geoffrey Rayner-Canham, *Chemistry was their Life: Pioneering British Women Chemists, 1880-1949* (London: Imperial College Press, 2008), p. 322.

³ Muriel Robertson, 'Marjory Stephenson, 1885-1948', *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society* **6** (1949), p. 574.

⁴ D.D. Woods, 'Obituary Notice: Marjory Stephenson (1885-1948)', *Biochemical Journal* **46** (1950), p. 377.