



**Marjory Stephenson** (left) and **Dorothy Needham** in academic robes, c. 1948.

Cambridge University Archives,  
Biochemistry Department  
Photograph Albums.

### Recognition

Taking a pragmatic and purposeful approach to life, Marjory Stephenson had little time for pride or egotism in others. Joan Mason relays the aside that she used to make fun of her male colleagues 'fussing about their reputations... as if they were aging virgins in a Victorian novel'.<sup>1</sup> In publication, she would take credit where credit was due – her name appeared only when she felt she had contributed sufficiently to the final outcome.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Stephenson herself was recognised for her achievements in the form of scholarships, awards, memberships, appointments and honorary degrees. Having obtained an MBE in recognition of her humanitarian war-work (December 1918), Stephenson waited many more years for similar recognition within the scientific community.

For many years during the 1920s, Stephenson existed on annually-renewed Medical Research Council (MRC) grants. In 1929, the MRC recruited Stephenson to its external staff and in 1936 Cambridge awarded her an ScD degree for outstanding research.<sup>3</sup> Even so, it was not until 1943 that Cambridge finally appointed Stephenson to a university lectureship, at the age of 58.

Perhaps most significant to the history of women in science was Stephenson's Fellowship of the Royal Society (FRS). In a further reflection of Stephenson's aversion to the rituals of status, she chose to leave the country to avoid further publicity when her nomination was announced.<sup>4</sup> It was then awarded to Stephenson in 1945, who became the first woman FRS (alongside that of **Kathleen Lonsdale**). This photograph shows Stephenson in the last year of her life in academic robes that reflect the professional status she had acquired, even if she personally gave short shrift to such ceremonies.

<sup>1</sup> Joan Mason, 'The Admission of the First Woman to the Royal Society of London', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* **46**:2 (1992), p. 288.

<sup>2</sup> D.D. Woods, 'Obituary Notice: Marjory Stephenson (1885-1948)', *Biochemical Journal* **46** (1950), p. 378.

<sup>3</sup> Mary R.S. Creese, 'Marjory Stephenson (1885-1947)', *Dictionary of National Biography* at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36280?docPos=14>

<sup>4</sup> Joan Mason, 'The Admission of the First Women to the Royal Society of London', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* **46** (1992), p. 288.