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Frederick Gowland Hopkins (left), c. 1941.
Cambridge University Archives, Biochemistry
Department Photograph Albums.

Men and Mentorship

Frederick Gowland Hopkins (1861-1947) in the Cambridge laboratories, 1941.

The image shows Hopkins in his eighties, as an elder grandee of biochemistry, and captures the mixed research culture that Hopkins had done so much to promote. A large number of women joined Hopkins's Biochemical Department after it opened in 1914; something Harmke Kamminga has observed as all the more remarkable in the context of Cambridge's still heavily patriarchal interwar research culture.¹

Hopkins and **Charles Martin** (Lister Institute) were notable in supporting the entry of many women researchers into their teams, while the historian Marsha Richmond has described **William Bateson** (Cambridge; John Innes) as a 'model mentor' for those such as **Muriel Wheldale**.²

The mentorship that such figures provided extended beyond an egalitarianism of spirit. Chick's diary entries frequently refer to valuable conversations with Charles Martin, often during the course of vigorous walks in Battersea Park, across the river from the Lister Institute's Chelsea laboratories. Hopkins too, directly influenced the research paths of some of the most distinguished women biochemists before 1939.

Harriette Chick's diaries, for instance reveal that it was Hopkins who on 12 May 1919 had advised that she should 'perhaps transfer its energies to E[astern] Europe'.³ The following year, he advised **Marjory Stephenson** to shift her attention from vitamins to bacterial biochemistry.⁴ In each case, these women followed Hopkins's advice and developed widely acclaimed expertise in their new area.

Of course, it is uncertain precisely how far such women adapted or assimilated such advice into their existing plans, projects and priorities. And the significant influence exerted by male mentors emphasized the power of some men as 'gatekeepers' and carried with it the danger that women scientists would not always receive credit for their own work.

¹ Harmke Kamminga, 'Hopkins and Biochemistry', in Peter Harman and Simon Mitton (eds), *Cambridge Scientific Minds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 179.

² Marsha Richmond, "'A Lab of One's Own': The Balfour Biological Laboratory for Women at Cambridge at Cambridge University, 1884-1914', *Isis* **88** (1997), p. 405.

³ Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine, Harriette Chick, PP/CHI/A.1/3, Diaries, 12 May 1919.

⁴ Robert E. Kohler, 'Innovation in Normal Science: Bacterial Physiology', *Isis* **76** (1985), p. 166.