Stopes, Marie Charlotte Carmichael from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

English pioneer of birth control. Stopes campaigned for a more rational and open approach to contraception, establishing the first birth control clinic in Britain in 1921. She wrote *Wise Parenthood* (1918) and *Contraception: Its Theory, History and Practice* (1923, 1931).

Summary Article: Stopes, Marie Charlotte Carmichael (1880-1958)
from *The Hutchinson Dictionary of Scientific Biography*

Place: United Kingdom, Scotland

Subject: biography, biology

Scottish advocate of birth control who, in 1921, founded the first instructional clinic for contraception in the UK.

Marie Stopes was born on 15 October 1880 in Edinburgh. Her mother was a feminist and one of the first woman members of Edinburgh University; her father was an English brewing engineer from Essex. She read botany at University College, London, graduating in 1902, then went to the University of Munich in Germany, from which she gained her doctorate in 1904. She was awarded her DSc from London University in 1905, when only 25 years old, and then taught at the University of Manchester - the first woman to be appointed to the science staff there. For several years she continued her palaeobotanical research into fossil plants and primitive cycads and became one of the foremost investigators in her field. In 1911 she married Reginald Ruggles Gates, a Canadian botanist, and left Manchester University. But the marriage was not consummated and was annulled in 1916.

The breakdown of her marriage stimulated Marie Stopes's interest in the subject of sexual intercourse, personal relationships, and marriage, and in 1918 she published *Married Love*, the underlying theme of which is that women should be able to enjoy sexual intercourse on the basis of equality with men; in the book she also referred briefly to contraceptive methods. This topic was extremely controversial in the UK at that time and she had great difficulty in finding a publisher. Even after it was published, *Married Love* met with considerable opposition: for example, C P Blacker (later to help in the creation of the International Planned Parenthood Foundation) said that the book was 'responsible for printing instructions to girls of initially dubious virtues as to how to adopt the profession of more or less open prostitution'. Nevertheless, Marie Stopes received many requests for more information and advice about contraception from women who had read her book, so later in the same year she wrote and published *Wise Parenthood*, in which she attempted to answer the queries she had received.

Also in 1918 Marie Stopes married for the second time; her husband was Humphrey Verdon Roe, the co-founder (with Alliot Verdon Roe) of the A V Roe aircraft company. Roe supported Marie Stopes’s ideas and sponsored her birth control clinic, the first one in the UK, which opened in 1921 in Marlborough Road, Holloway, London. This event re-roused vehement opposition, especially from the Roman Catholic Church, and Marie Stopes spent the next few years both promoting and defending the idea of contraception. In 1934 she published another book *Birth Control Today*, in which she voiced her disapproval of abortion as a means of population control, describing women who sought abortions as ‘a danger to the human race’. She continued to champion the cause of birth control in her later years.
travelling to many different countries to do so. She died on 2 October 1958 near Dorking, Surrey, having brought about a considerable change in general attitudes towards a more widespread acceptance of contraception, a trend that continued after her death - although even today the subject still arouses controversy and opposition, particularly from certain religious groups.
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