

BOOK REVIEW

Pathfinder: The Life of Hariette Chick How the Study of Vitamins Blazed a Trail for Women in Science *by Stephen M Sagar*

Paperback, 184 pages
Caracol Press
October 2025

This slim paperback of 174 pages has an attractive photograph of an older Chick on the front, and an earlier, very Victorian looking one on the frontispiece. The 11 chapters are a simple chronological format and describe the Chick family, childhood and working life. A couple of pictures are described but frustratingly not included nor attributed and a family tree would have helped to illustrate/explain the various relations included.

The writing is clear and simple; outlining education, employment and areas of research, the last in suitable detail to impart an understanding to most readers whether or not they are science based. There are insights into work at the Lister Institute ranging from sewage bacteriology, antisera and nutrition – proving the necessity of accessory food factors (as vitamins were known) in the diet and assigning each deficiency identified relevant preventive/curative foodstuffs. Work in a post WWI Vienna orphanage provided the opportunity for never to be repeated controlled trials, and knowledge that was vital for advising government rationing policy during WWII.

There are some irritating asides such as the statement “Marmite, which the British, but only the British, find palatable” but in general they serve to lighten the darkness of widespread malnutrition driven by war and industrialisation.

The final chapter, Legacy, provides a recap and explores the author’s assertion that Chick’s research paved the way for women in science which had hitherto been forbidden or deemed beyond women (by men). It is a simple, and reasonable argument. Other factors were in play. Hariette Chick, a smart, focussed researcher undoubtedly contributed a great deal, and continued to do so even as a centenarian.

The book also includes two bibliographies: a full list of Hariette Chick’s papers and another of other sources. Each chapter is referenced at the ends and there are helpful footnotes.

This is a well-researched, easy read for anyone interested in a book presented in an approachable manner but with sufficient supporting information to satisfy the serious investigator.

Tina Matthews
November 2025

Published online at www.bshhm.org.uk.