

Catherine Booth, Science Curator (retired), National Library of Scotland
Questions from Kenmore Primary 5 – 7 children
Minerva Scientifica *Echoes from Ben Lawers*

Catherine Booth visited the school to tell them about some of the women in science from history who visited their area. She also attended their performance for their parents in September 2018 and the children were keen to ask her even more questions than they had when she visited!

1. ALL ABOUT CATHERINE

a. *Who inspired you?*

My granny, who was a primary school teacher, but had to give up work when she got married - women were forced to do that then. She sadly died when I was only 9, but I still remember asking her loads of questions, and she was always patient, and gave me great answers.

b. *What made you so inspired?*

The fact that she knew so much and helped me to be even more curious about the world around me.

c. *How did you learn so much?*

I don't think I have learned a lot - there is so much I still feel I don't know! I love trying to find out, and when I was growing up, that often meant finding a book which would give you the answers to your questions. We had no Internet until I was really quite old, so it could take quite a lot of work to find an answer.

d. *What is your favourite music?*

Ooh - I like lots of classical music, but I also remember lots of the pop songs of the 1960s. We used to listen to them on the radio or on Top of the Pops, or we saved up to buy what we called records, but people now call "vinyl". There were not even CDs when I was young.

e. *What is your favourite type of science?*

I like chemistry, as I like the idea of combining substances to make something completely different - a bit like cooking, I suppose.

f. *Who is your favourite scientist?*

That's a difficult one, as I have so many favourites! I think I would have loved to meet Mary Somerville, as she seems to have been interested in everything, understood so much about astronomy and physics, and would have been a great person to talk to. But I also admire some of the male scientists of the past, and my absolute favourite of them is James Clerk Maxwell, also born in Scotland. If any of you have never heard of him, you need to find out about him now! It is his science that we use in our mobile phones, televisions and almost all our electronic equipment. He also did lots of work on the behaviour of gas particles, he worked out a way of taking the first ever colour photograph, and he came up with a theory, now proved to be correct, about Saturn's rings, and what they were made of. He was a quiet modest man who never bragged about his achievements, and he died when he was only 48.

2. THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND

a. *How old is the library?*

The actual National Library of Scotland was only founded in the 1920s, but its collections began long before that - in the 1680s, as the Library of the Faculty of Advocates. From 1710, it was allowed to claim - free of charge - one copy of every book published in Britain. It still does that, but now gets many of its books electronically, and has to save them digitally for the use of researchers hundreds of years from now. That has meant that the Library has had to make sure it has the best possible technology to store all the electronic publications which come in. This

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is very different from storing books printed on paper. The Library has had centuries of experience storing and preserving them, and knows exactly how best to do that.

b. *How many floors does the library have?*

The oldest of the Library buildings in the centre of Edinburgh has 15 floors, but another more modern Library building has 7 floors. Books are stored by size, so that rows of shelves can be the right size for the books which are on them. This means that people don't go and look out books for themselves like you would do in a public library. You have to request a book, and wait until a bookfetcher brings it to you. Because there is usually only one copy of each book, you are not allowed to take any of them home, and the Library is strict about how you handle them when you are reading them. You are not allowed to use pens, only pencils, and certainly no highlighters, and no food or drink can be taken into the reading room. People are still very welcome to visit and use the Library - they just have to obey the rules!

c. *How many books are in the library?*

That's a difficult question, as you have to think about whether you count every single map or manuscript, or magazine as a book! The Library says that it has over 7 million actual books, but over 14 million printed items, and over 2 million maps.

d. *How long did you work in the national library?*

I worked as a member of staff for over 28 years in the National Library of Scotland, but I have retired now. I still go in as a reader though, as it's a great place to get information.

3. NORA MILLER

a. *How old was Nora Miller when she died?*

I think I want to ask you to find that out for yourselves! Look up the website, <https://minervascientifica.co.uk>

b. *How did Nora Miller dive?*

She dived in the 1930s, so had no fancy diving suit. She had an open helmet, and weights on her feet. A tube to her mouth gave her oxygen, and her friend had to keep pumping from the boat, to keep her oxygen supply going. It must have been really dangerous, but she loved doing it.

c. *What animals did Nora Miller film?*

Lots of small marine creatures who were swimming underwater. I don't know the names of them, but I'm sure she did.

4. *What did Williamina Fleming's son do?*

He is said to have become a mining engineer, who worked in Chile.