

Mary Fairfax Somerville (1780–1872)



Born in Scotland in 1780, Mary Somerville (née Fairfax) became interested in mathematics when listening to her brother's geometry lessons. She was largely self-taught in mathematics through reading works by Euclid, Newton, and others. She served as a mathematics tutor to Ada Lovelace. Somerville's *The Mechanism of the Heavens* (1831) brought her international acclaim and was a standard university textbook for decades. Later

books included *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences* (1834) and *Physical Geography* (1848), each of which had considerable international impact. She was the first woman to have a paper read to the Royal Society, and was elected to multiple scientific and scholarly societies.

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