

Register for the competition on the form at <http://www.cipher.maths.soton.ac.uk/registration>

National Cipher Challenge 2009, part 2A

January 21st 1834

My Dearest Mr. Babbage,

I was most distressed to hear of the break in at the workshop last Thursday evening, but I bring most shocking news of the utmost importance. The sister of my maid Charlotte has taken service in the household of Lord Pennylaine and brings the following revelation. The break in appears to have been engineered by Lord Pennylaine in order to demonstrate his relatively unfettered access to the machinery of the Difference Engine. Your reticence in confronting him appears to be well founded - he is known to be consorting with the most unsavoury associates of Niepce; agents of France and certain to be working to gain access to our devices and inventions.

As for my late father's puzzle, Professor Somerville remarked that there might be a hint to the secrets of its encryption in a poem, well known to those inhabitants of the forum as Byron's Enigma. You may know of it and I certainly intend to study it as soon as I may.

Your thoughts on a family of more general computing engines are most intriguing, but may I take the liberty of suggesting that a more valuable device would be furnished by a single mechanism which might be configured by means of a sequence of mechanical instructions to carry out various tasks. I am brought to this suggestion by a study of the most ingenious mechanism of the Jacquard Loom, which, being a single mechanism can yet be instructed by means of punctured cards to weave many remarkable and quite different patterns. I look forward to an early opportunity to discuss these new ideas with you.

Faithfully yours,
Ada Lovelace

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National Cipher Challenge 2009, part 2B

January 17th 1834

My dear Monsieur Monhier, I am delighted to enclose the item you requested. As you can see, in design and manufacture it is a singularly well-executed component, and I can assure you that the full mechanism, in so far as it has been completed, is constructed to the same high standards. The chief engineer Clement is a friend of the genius Brunel, and I have the utmost confidence that, without my regular interference the project would already be close to completion. It is apparent that the benefit to your compatriots of possessing such a machine will be greatly multiplied if they alone possess it, and I might modestly claim to be alone in the power that I have to effect such a happy outcome.



Of course such a situation would be of extreme benefit to you, while placing me at a considerable risk and I hope that you will appreciate the justice in my request for an appropriate settlement for these valuable services, and products, which I, and I alone, can offer.

As a token of your sincerity in these delicate negotiations I merely ask for a small consideration. A sum of two hundred guineas should suffice – if that is agreeable to you.

Yours, P.