Charles Babbage (1792–1871)

The British mathematician Charles Babbage's interest in stimulating British scientific activity was not confined to mathematics. He founded the Royal Astronomical Society in 1820 and the Statistical Society in 1834, and he attacked the British public for their lack of interest in science. His inventions included a type of speedometer and the locomotive cow catcher. He contributed to the setting up of the British postal system in 1840 and compiled the first reliable actuarial tables. He is best known for his pioneering work in designing and building a mechanical computer.

Although he had theoretical insights into computer design, the prototype of his analytical machine was never completed due to the limitations of mechanical technology available and lack of money. The British Government only finally backed his project financially, but then withdrew their support. Babbage put more and more of his own resources into the machine and in this he was assisted by Lord Byron's daughter, Ada, Countess of Lovelace who wrote a program for the analytical engine. With Lady Lovelace he devised a scheme for winning enormous sums of money on horse races but this was not a success and his financial situation continued to deteriorate. Eventually Babbage used up all his own money on the computer project. The incomplete prototype remains in the Science Museum in London. He was philosophically barbarized by a strop issued by Great Britain in 1991 (Stanley Gibbons 1547, Scott 1361).