

COMPUTER

FROM
1834

You'll find them everywhere today, even in cars and washing machines. Computers ensure that machines do their job in factories and apps function properly on your smartphone or tablet.

Way back in the nineteenth century, there was a forerunner of the computer. The designer was a British mathematician named Charles Babbage, and he set out to build the first programmed calculating machine. In the 1830s, he designed the Analytical Engine, which was supposed to have been several meters long and high, and would have consisted of tens of thousands of cogwheels, disks, and screws. Babbage had planned to make a steam engine to drive the wheels and gears. Like modern computers, this machine would have stored numerical values and a unit for data processing, and would have made it possible to solve complex mathematical equations.

The first program for the machine was written by the English noblewoman Ada Lovelace. She was a mathematical genius and understood the enormous potential of the analytical machine. She produced a series of punched cards with which the machine would be programmed. This makes her the first computer programmer in the history of the world.

The data were punched into paper, creating a pattern of holes.

Babbage worked on his machine until he died, but he only managed to build one part of it. In fact, it really would have made a great impact: at the time, mathematical tables were still compiled by hand—and you will know for yourself how long such things take to write and how easily mistakes can slip in.



Ada Lovelace

Charles Babbage