# BABBAGE

1792 - 1871

Charles Babbage was a British mathematician and engineer. He had a reputation for being rather picky with his maths too. Lord Tennyson (a famous poet if you really have to ask) once wrote:

*‘Every minute dies a man,*

*Every minute one is born.’*

Babbage knew that this was incorrect and wrote to the poet instructing him to change the second line to, ‘*Every minute one and a sixth is born*.’ Tennyson thought this sounded rather silly and refused.

Charles had inherited loads of money from his Dad, and spent it all on inventing things. Among the more exciting of his inventions were the speedometer and the cowcatcher (to ram wandering cows off the railway line). But without a doubt, the most important of his inventions was the first calculator.

The first calculator that was planned was called the ‘Difference Engine’.

The British government liked his idea and gave him £1 million to help him build it. After 11 years Babbage gave up because he had a better idea. Unfortunately, the government was furious at wasting their money and refused to give him any more. Babbage had to use his own money instead.

The new machine would be able to do multiplication, division and also printing. Rather strangely, it would use the same technology as carpet-making looms. But the machine was too complicated for the day, and despite spending his entire fortune in trying, Babbage died before it could be built.

Eventually, an American bloke called Herman used Babbage’s ideas to build a simpler machine in 1890. He went on to found International Business Machines – or IBM. Only in 1944 were IBM able to construct the machine of Babbage’s dreams. The first calculator needed a square room 10 metres across to house it, and it weighed 30 tons!

Babbage’s Grand Designs

In 1992, the Science Museum in London built a model of the original Difference Engine. It is 2 metres high and over 3 metres long!