

WOMEN WHO MADE BRITAIN

ADA LOVELACE 1815 – 1852

English mathematician Ada Lovelace, the daughter of Lord Byron, has been called “The first computer programmer” for writing an algorithm for a computing machine in the mid – 1800’s

She was the daughter of the famed poet Lord Byron.

She was Augusta Ada Byron, Countess of Lovelace – better known as ‘Ada Lovelace ‘

Ada translated an article by Charles Babbage and added her own comments when still in her teens. Lovelace is considered the first computer programmer. She died on November 27th 1852.

Ada was born as Augusta Ada Byron on December 10th 1815. Her mother was Lady Anne Isabella Milbanke Byron. The marriage was not a happy one. She separated from lord Byron shortly after Ada was born and a few months later he went to Greece and died when Ada was about 8 years old. Ada never having seen her father.

She had an unusual upbringing for an aristocrat. Her mother, not wanting her to have any of her father’s moody and unpredictable traits had tutors to teach her Mathematics and Science. Unheard of in the mid 1800’s. She also was forced to lie down for extended periods of time as her mother believed this would help her develop self control.

Around the age of 17 Ada met Charles Babbage, a mathematician and inventor. They became friends

and Babbage who was much older than Ada, became her mentor. Ada then began advanced Mathematical studies with the University of London Professor, Augustus de Morgan.

Ada was fascinated by Babbage’s ideas. Known as the Father of the computer he invented the difference engine which was meant to perform mathematical calculations. Ada saw this machine and was captivated by it.

Ada was asked to translate an article by Babbage that had been written by an Italian engineer Luigi Federico Menebera for a Swiss Journal. She not only translated it from the French into English but wrote her own thoughts and ideas on the machine. Her notes ended up being three times the length of the original.

Her work was published in 1843 in an English Science Journal. She used only the initials A.A.L. [Augusta Ada Lovelace.] for the publication.

In her notes she described how codes could be created to handle letters and symbols and numbers. She also thought of a message to repeat instructions which is known as looping, used in computers TODAY.

For this Ada is often called to be the First Computer Programmer.

Unfortunately little attention was taken when she was alive.

Ada died of Uterine Cancer in London on November 27th 1852 a month short of her 37th Birthday. She was buried next to her Father in the cemetery of the Church of Mary Magdalene, Nottingham.

In her personal life she married William King, who became the Earl of Lovelace three years after their marriage. She became the Countess of Lovelace in 1838. They had 3 children. Her husband supported her work and they socialised with many great mind of the times. Michael Faraday, the Scientist and the writer Charles Dickens.

Ada's health suffered after a bout of Cholera in 1837. She also suffered from Asthma and with her Digestive system. She also had mood swings and hallucinations.

Ada's contributions to the field of Computer Science was not discovered until the 1950's. B.V.Bowden, who published them in "FASTER THAN THOUGHT ON DIGITAL COMPUTER MACHINES" IN 1953.

Since then Ada has received many posthumous honours for her work. In 1980 the U.S. Department of Defence named a newly developed computer language "ADA" after Lovelace.

My nomination. Eric Reuberson. 28/04/2020