

Somerville and Mathematics

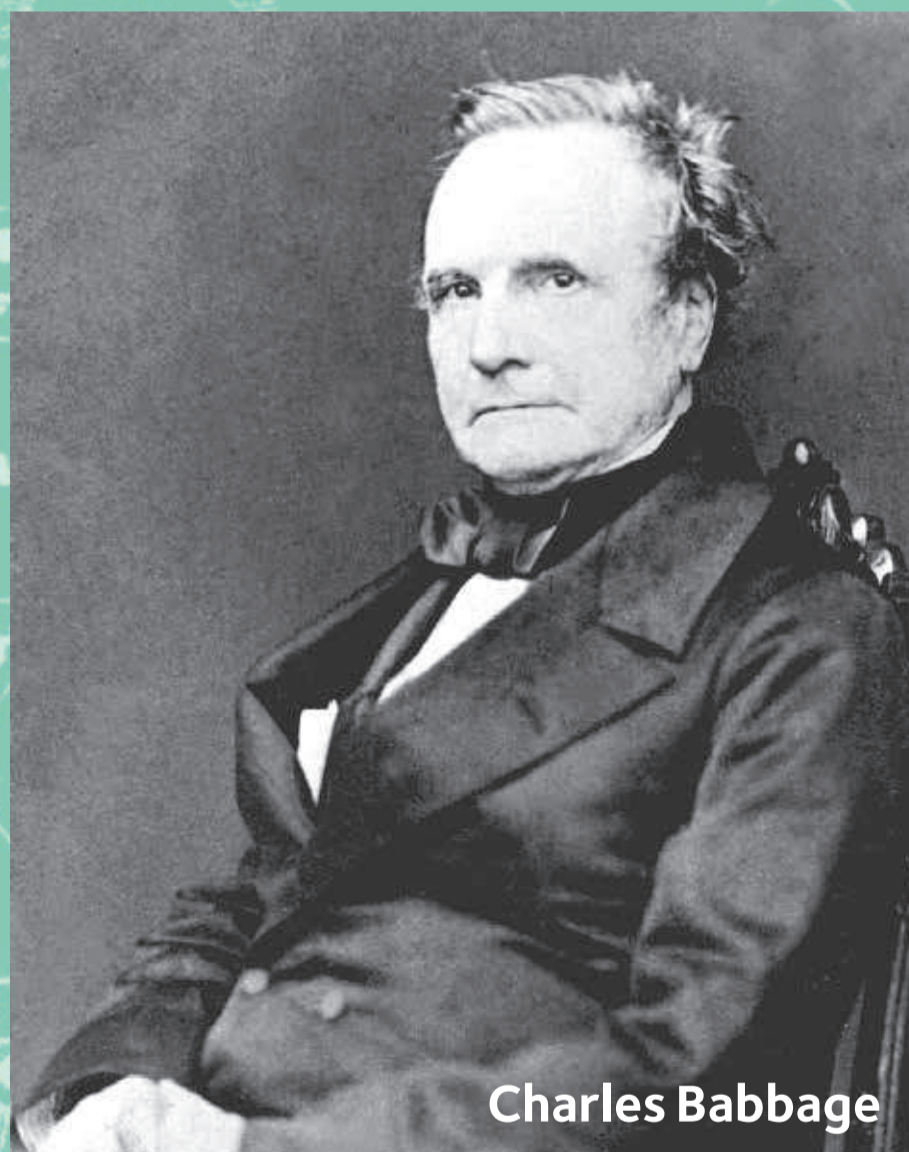


Mathematical
Institute

Somerville College was founded in 1879 as one of the first women's colleges in Oxford, on the site where it still stands to the south of the new Mathematical Institute. The college was named after mathematician and scientist Mary Somerville who had died seven years before its foundation. Its alumnae include mathematicians Kathleen Ollerenshaw and Caroline Series.

Mary Somerville (1780–1872)

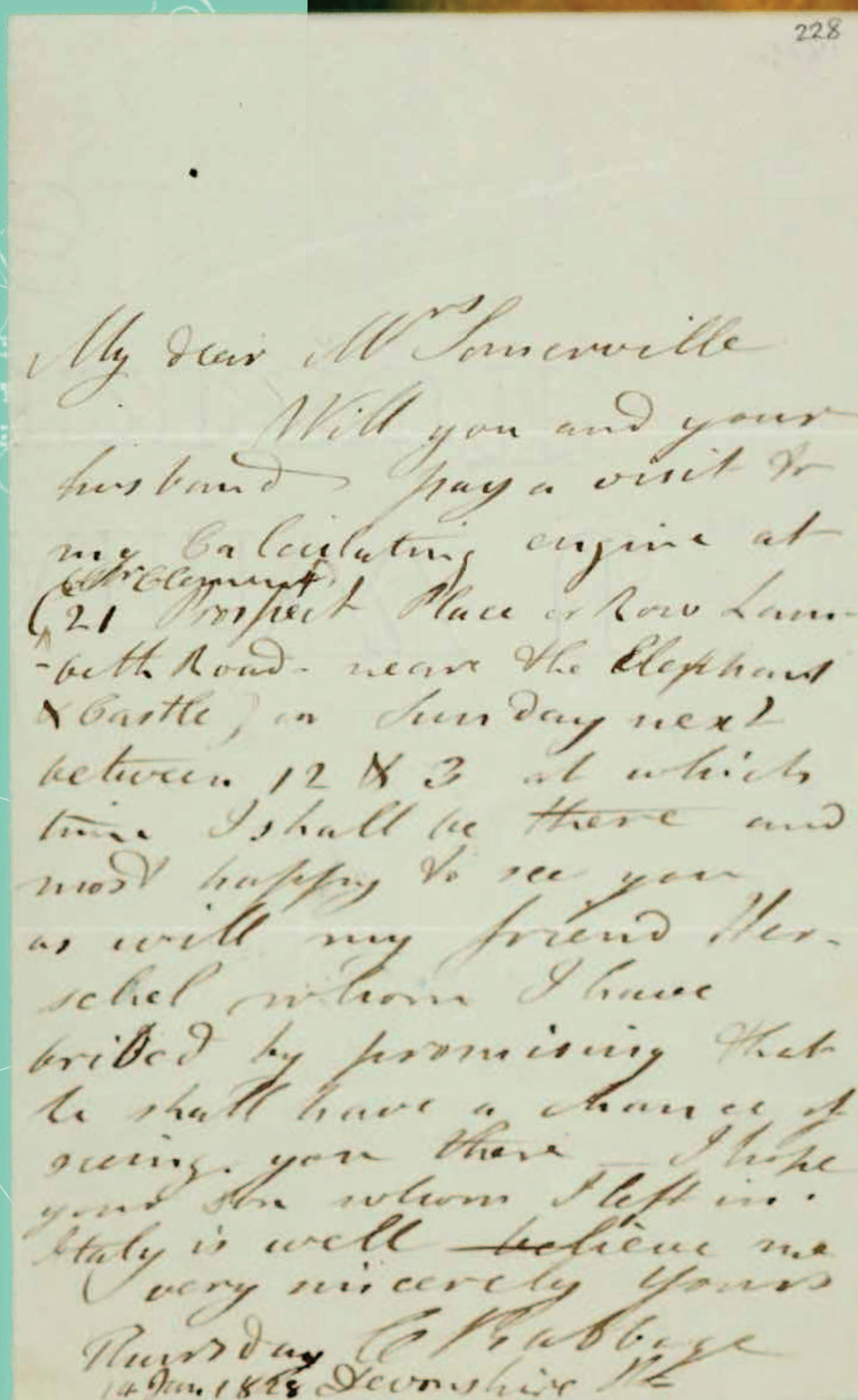
Mary Somerville began to publish in 1826 and became famous for her translation and exposition of Laplace's 'Mécanique Céleste', which appeared in 1831 under the title 'The Mechanism of the Heavens'. Her scientific works included three other important books as well as further writing on science and mathematics; the word 'scientist' was first used in a review of one of her books.



Charles Babbage



Ada Lovelace



Somerville College owns a letter from Charles Babbage to Mary Somerville inviting her to view his 'Calculating Engine'.

Babbage had designed his engine to incorporate many of the features of the modern digital computer. He constructed a small working section, which was seen in 1833 by 17-year-old Ada, the sole legitimate child of the poet Lord Byron. Ada Byron (later Lovelace) had been trained in mathematics and went on to collaborate with Babbage. She gave the first published description of the steps his engine would take to solve certain mathematical problems, and is often referred to as 'the first computer programmer'.