

University of Southampton National Cipher Challenge

Solutions

Solution: Message 10

Plaintext:

Confidential

Dear W,

My own inexperience in such matters suggests that I should place myself in your good hands, but I must admit a reluctance to allow the rogue to walk free, having engaged in such callow treachery with the old enemy. Is it not possible to use our knowledge to spring a trap, perhaps calling on the assistance of Peel's metropolitan force? Perhaps we could offer to discuss terms in some public forum and wrest the plans from the miscreant with their help? The Monument would provide a convenient location for such a rendezvous. I suggest we offer seventy guineas for the safe return of the plans but be prepared to go as high as one hundred guineas if he proves intractable. I would be able to provide such a sum if necessary.

However, I do feel unequal to the task of dealing directly with this fellow, and would ask if you could make the necessary arrangements.

Looking forward to a speedy and successful conclusion to this most disagreeable affair.

Yours as ever, B.

Cipher:

- A Vigenere cipher based on the keyword MESPION, the name of the ill-fated spy.

Notes:

- Robert Peel's 1829 Metropolitan Police Act established a body of uniformed officers (known after him as "Peelers" or "Bobbies") to maintain law and order in parts of London. Initially unpopular, and regarded as infringing citizens' liberties, they were soon accepted (at least by the non-criminal population) and within a few years most boroughs had their own police force. Sir Robert Peel (1788-1850) was Prime Minister briefly in 1834-5, and again from 1841 to 1846. He is widely regarded as one of the founders of the modern Conservative Party.
<http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/police.htm>
<http://www.geocities.com/thepeelsociety/index.html>
- A guinea was 21 shillings, that is, £1.05 in modern currency; the word survives in the names of some horse races, such as the 2000 Guineas. Inflation between the 1830s and now means that its buying power then was much greater than it would be now, so 70 or 100 guineas would have been a significant sum of money. For instance, when Sir Rowland Hill introduced the first postage

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stamp, the Penny Black, in 1840, a letter could be sent for one old penny, that is, $1/240$ of a pound. Comparing that with today's postage rates suggests that the cost of posting a letter has been multiplied by about 60 since then; a simple calculation with logarithms shows that this corresponds to an annual inflation rate of about 2.5%. For more on the Penny Black, see

- <http://www.themysterybox.com/FHist.html>



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