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IT'S A 'GRAND' DAY FOR YOUNG CODE BREAKER

A young code breaker is £1000 richer today after winning first prize in a National Cipher Challenge for schools, devised by Southampton University and sponsored by GCHQ.

GCHQ has awarded a £1000 prize to James Lloyd, a sixth-form pupil at Portsmouth Grammar School, for being the first to complete a demanding National Cipher Challenge. Devised by Dr Graham Niblo, Senior Lecturer in Mathematics at Southampton University, this year's Internet-based challenge comprised a series of ten encrypted telegrams telling the story of a mysterious group of scientists working on a secret nuclear weapons project in 1937.

Receiving his prize from a GCHQ cryptographer at a ceremony set in the historic Bletchley Park Mansion, James commented: "I was delighted to come 4th last year in the National Cipher Challenge but was determined to see if I could win the overall championship this year." A GCHQ spokesman added: "Graham Niblo deserves a lot of credit for creating this superb annual challenge – it adds excitement to school mathematics and might well persuade some of the competitors to join the ranks of our cryptographers at GCHQ in a few years time."

Two schools won the other major prizes on offer sponsored by IBM. Robert Lazenby from Comberton Village College, Cambridge, won a laptop computer and Natasha Morrison, Naomi Miller, Abi Shultz and Karina Morrison from Oxford High School shared £1000 for devising a high quality computer programme to crack codes.

It was fitting that the prize-giving event took place at Bletchley Park, the World War II home of the British code breakers who cracked the German Enigma code. By a strange coincidence, James Lloyd had already been awarded the Sainsbury Scholarship at Portsmouth Grammar School in honour of NT Sainsbury who worked at Bletchley Park during the war.

This year's challenge was Southampton University's most successful since it was first launched in 2002, and drew entries from almost 4000 pupils attending over 400 schools across the UK

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