

The history OF COMPUTERS



205BCE

The Antikythera Mechanism

In 1900, a group of people diving near the Greek island of Antikythera found this machine on the sea floor. For many years, no one understood what it was or how it worked. Scientists now say it was used to find out the positions of the sun, moon and stars. Many people call it the world's earliest 'computer'.



Alan Turing

Alan Turing wasn't well known when he was alive, but he's now one of the most famous scientists of the 20th century. His ideas on computer science changed the world. He worked on the first digital computer – it was called Colossus, weighed 30 tonnes, and was as big as a large living room.

1940s

From the 1950s

Modern computers

From the 1950s, computers got smaller, faster and cheaper. Today, the smallest mobile phones have more memory than the biggest early computers. And computers are getting better all the time. However, they are not perfect. One of the worst problems is computer viruses. You can lose a lot of information when one gets on your machine. Be careful about what you download from the internet.

around 2,700 BCE to today

The abacus

People still use abacuses today in many parts of the world, especially to teach maths to children. Of course, they are very different from modern computers, but the idea is the same – to answer difficult maths questions much more quickly than a human can.



1791–1871
and 1815–1852

Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace

The modern computer was Charles Babbage's idea. The machine he wanted to build, called a 'difference engine', was special because it had all the parts that a modern computer has. It could save information and was also a kind of printer. Ada Lovelace was the first computer programmer. She had the idea for 'software' – a way of telling a computer to do different things.

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READING

- 1 Do you know the names of any early computers? Read the article once and check your ideas.
- 2 Complete the sentences with one or two words from the article.
 - 1 Some children use an abacus to learn how to do _____.
 - 2 Charles Babbage's computer had several different _____.
 - 3 The first person to program a computer was _____.
 - 4 Colossus was as big as a _____.
 - 5 Modern _____ are small but can do more than the biggest computers of the past.



TALKING POINTS

Computers can now do a lot of clever things. But are they more intelligent than us? Why / Why not?