

GETTING IN TOUCH THROUGH THE AGES

Nobody knows who wrote the first letter or when, but we know that 4000 years ago in Ancient Egypt people carried letters by hand over hundreds of kilometers. Very few people could write, so there were special people, called scribes, who wrote letters for everyone else.

In those days you didn't need a stamp. The first stamp didn't appear until 1840 and it cost just one penny. Nowadays one of these original stamps cost \$375. Letter writing was so popular in the 1840s that they delivered the post several times a day!

An American company- Remington and sons- made the first typewriter in 1871. All the letters in the word "typewriter" were on the top line of the keyboard so that salesman could demonstrate the machine more easily. Amazingly, the letters are still in the same place on the modern computer keyboard!

In 1876, when Alexander Graham Bell demonstrated fantastic new invention called the telephone, nobody was very interested in it. The first fax machine appeared at around the same time, but it was so enormous that no one wanted one- in fact fax machines didn't become popular for another hundred years.

Then there was the walkie-talkie, a small two-way radio first used by the US army in the 1930s. However, since they weighed around 13.5 kilos, the talking was perhaps easier than the walking. After World War Two they became popular with police officers. Before that they had to use whistles to call for help.

Nowadays of course we can send messages and pictures around the world in a few seconds using computers and mobile phones. It's hard to believe that e-mail was only invented in 1971, and the first text message was sent in 1992. Today we send over a billion text messages around the world every single day, and an incredibly thirty-six billion e-mails.

- a. How did people deliver letters in Ancient Egypt?
- b. How much did the first stamp cost?
- c. How often did they deliver letters in the 1840s?
- d. How are the letters arranged on a modern computer keyboard?
- e. When did the first fax machine appear?
- f. Why was it difficult to walk with the first walkie-talkies?
- g. When was the first text message?
- h. How many e-mails do we send every day?