

The Pen Knife And The Left Handed Pen

Ink cartridges have revolutionised written communications. Time and labour saving are just two of the assets of today's ink cartridge. This is one small demonstration of the way the pace of life has picked up, to the point of not having time to hand write anything. Many people still extol the virtues of the written word, particularly older people who truly appreciate receiving a letter from a friend or relative. Communication was more of a concern than speed before the invention of the ink cartridge. The human race have always had this built in need to leave their mark on the world, to communicate their life story and pass on useful information. Cave men were not the Neanderthals people think, simply concerned with hunting, grunting and reproducing. They coped with every-day life just as we do but with different priorities. In a bid to leave their mark and not be forgotten, they used sharp implements to etch their memories on cave walls. Clay tablets were developed later on to make information transportable, so much easier than lugging your cave around with you. Caveman etchings consisted of a series of pictures that any onlookers could understand and the first alphabet that was written left to right was invented by the Greeks in 400BC, all in upper case due to the rudimentary nature of writing implements fashioned from bone, ivory or metal. They used these first 'pens' to mark wax coated tablets that were hinged together 'book' style, in order for them to close and protect the contents. I'm sure the Greeks would have appreciated the ease of ink cartridges but at least they were able to condense their communications with the first text messages without the need for pictures. The Chinese invented 'Indian Ink' from a mixture of soot from pine smoke and lamp oil mixed with gelatine of donkey skin and musk. In common use by 1200BC, I'm sure this came with a fairly pungent smell! Other cultures used a mixture of natural dyes and some of these ideas have held fast until today. Inventions of paper and ink pretty much paralleled over the years. Paper made from wood fibre came about in 105AD but was kept as a secret within the country until around 700AD, after which it rapidly spread. However, it wasn't until the late 14th Century with the widespread building of paper mills that paper became available throughout Europe. Reed pens made from hollow grass or bamboo stems were popular for a period but it was the quill pen that dominated for the longest. Quill pens only lasted a week, even if you chose the strongest feathers. It was well known that the strongest were taken from living birds in the spring from the five outer left wing feathers. The left was picked because of the curvature of the quill when held in the right hand but this left the option of using quills from the right wing to make left handed pens. A special knife was used to sharpen these quills bringing about the first pen knife. Pens that last one week? What a throw away culture! Today, of course, advancements are made all the time for different applications. Take, for example, the amount of money spent on trying to invent a pen that would work in outer space with zero gravity. I think the Russians had that one sussed by using a pencil! And then, of course, is the invention of the disappearing biro. The one you put down and apparently morphes into its surroundings, never to be seen again. I've bought countless pens of that type. At least we know, when we buy an ink cartridge, that it's just that bit too big to disappear on us.

About the Author

Printing expert Catherine Harvey looks at the inventions that led up to the ink cartridges we use today. To find out more please visit <http://www.inksave.co.uk/>

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