The Road to Artificial Intelligence

Finding myself immersed in a current project - being an interest I have had since the early seventies, I was bemused to look back at how my interest began and why it has persisted until the present day, albeit having effectively laid dormant.

My first job was working for GEC Telecommunications in Coventry, having previously had a hobbyist interest in electronics whilst at secondary school. After only four years working in various aspects of telecommunications, I decided to go for a job vacancy at Warwick University in the Department of Computer Science. At that time (1973) I can not recall why I had an interest in computers, but I got the job. This involved working on the maintenance of computer terminals which at that time were in the form of Teletypes which were electromechanical typewriter like devices of American manufacture. These terminals were connected to a mainframe computer in the department and also in other departments around the University, which used the mainframe computer in the computer science department.

As well as other electronics duties, including building circuits and so on, there was some robotics research in progress which I did some work on, although the research was very academic, including research students doing PhDs and so on. Although I was not deeply involved in the robotics vehicles which had been constructed, one of which was featured on the BBC Television Tomorrow's World programme, I enjoyed a significant insight into this technology.

At the time of working in the department I engaged in an HNC Computer Studies course which involved COBOL and for FORTRAN programming on a mainframe computer at Lanchester Polytechnic (now Coventry University) and I was also able to use the mainframe machine at Warwick University.

My next job was at West Midlands Gas, working again in telecomms, which included VHF radio, microwave radio and telemetry. As far as I can remember there was little or no computer activity until I moved on to British Gas (HQ) at Hinckley, Leicestershire. My work there began with radio, but then I got involved in some new computer terminals called Superbrains which were self contained computers (but not the Microsoft PC of today). These had an 8 bit CPU and were used as freestanding desktop computers which the electronics workshop which I was running repaired and maintained. I then produced training courses for these devices and took those courses to North East Gas and North Thames Gas. I also produced the documentation for these courses.

As a result of this activity I was also developing an interest in home computers, firstly building a very simple single board computer, operated by machine code and seven segment display. Subsequently I acquired other home computers and in particular the BBC Micro Computer Model B. I developed computer beginner's course at two local colleges.

This was followed by applying for a full time lecturing position at Leamington College of FE, where I taught electronics and some simple robotics. While I was at Leamington College I contacted a colleague from Warwick University and paid him a visit to look at progress at that time in the field of robotics.

After being being in this job for less than two years, I moved on to Coventry Technical College where I taught mainly microprocessor hardware and software subjects. At the same time I maintained my hobbyist interest in home computers associated with electronics projects.

Moving to the South West (in 1989), I then worked part time at Bristol Polytechnic (now University of the West of England) where I continued teaching microprocessor subjects including C Programming, at degree level.

By 1990 I had been writing articles for technical magazines on the subjects of electronics and microelectronics and in fact did three series of articles on practical robotics at hobbyist level.

I also had a book published on amateur communications satellites, in 1990 which sold about 2000 copies.

Despite giving up lecturing and pursuing a part time book-keeping business which developed into an accountancy practice, I did not give up my interest in electronics and so on, but it was not until 2021, when the Covid pandemic struck and due to being restricted socially, I revisited my hobby interest of robotics. I built a number of robot vehicles and robot arms from kits, the latter which I developed into a simulated chess operation with two simple robot arms.

This particular activity was then put on hold and my next project was to write a number of books which I published on Amazon (I had actually begun this activity in 2017) but I ceased this when I became slightly disillusioned with the marketing aspects.

At this point I was seriously considering a new project which would fit in with my semi- retired lifestyle (consisting of a scaled down accountancy practice and weekly visits to a local primary school to listen to children reading).

In a very strange way, engaging in AI is almost a random event, spotting one or two books available on the subject of artificial intelligence (AI Superpowers and The Road to Conscious Machines). I then came across another book published in September 2023, called The Coming Wave. But as I had already decided that as I was not interested in producing any new books, it occurred to me that I could use my YouTube channel to produce a piece of work in the form of a video.

At the time of writing I have produced three videos, all uploaded to my channel and I am continuing this process. My objective is to produce short videos of around three minutes, explaining in simple terms what artificial intelligence is, how it works, how it is developing and its implications. Although there is a massive amount of information online and elsewhere (including YouTube), the amount of information can be confusing, overwhelming, misleading, but also very worrying.

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