



## Albion Mill Fires

On 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1791, a fire engulfed the Albion Mill, a steam-powered flour mill, in Southwark, now part of London, previously in Surrey. Arson was strongly suspected with the possible motive being workers' anger at sweeping industrialisation and the resulting loss of human jobs to machines. At the time, there was palpable anger across factories in England as human effort became redundant with the machines out-performing human workers with their superior capacities for working effectively and processing masses of flour with greater efficiency. How the fire at the mill started has, to this day, yet be explained conclusively but to many the Albion Mill Fires represented a growing sentiment in society; that automation was slowly rendering human skill and potentiality impotent and this was a threat to the lives of human beings.

Over 200 years later there is a new industrial revolution on the horizon. But unlike the industrial revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the present revolution is concerned not with muscle power but brain power. The question is posed, what can artificial intelligence do better than a human? The answer in the early stages was sometimes focused on Chess. AI quickly became adept at this and more recently the question has centred on Go, a Chinese board game that has more possible moves than atoms in universe. Earlier this year, an AI known as 'AlphaGo' defeated the human world champion in Korea. But beyond board games AI are out-performing humans in a variety of arenas and again questions of the need for humans is moving beyond the realm of strategy games. This is the era of the synthetic human where functions previously fulfilled by humanity are outsourced to computer chips and bundles of wires arranged in such a form to meet complex demands.

Will our 'synth' love lead to new Albion Mill Fires? As humans become obsolete, will humanity feel inadequate and will rage and sabotage ensue? With the singularity looming, as humanoids become capable of machine-learning and continuous self-improvement, will humans be shaken awake suddenly as if waking in a cold sweat from a vivid recurring nightmare?

In all generations there are new frontiers of thought to be examined and old ways of thinking to be breached. Those ideas you carry with you, deep down, passed along generations. Some lenses come to be revealed, whilst you continue to reside in other boxes, unaware of the six walls around you; buried underneath, lying persistent in your being and raising their antennae at unexpected moments. Will there be new Albion Mill Fires to be had here too?

The miller who processes the flour, with their dry, cracked hands, will they set a torch at the foot of the machine, and oppose that which threatens to make them an irrelevance? Will these beautiful, dissenting minds, conjure new Albion Mill Fires?