

Hallucinations

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There has been some discussion of AI here of late. I have been reading about it and came across the concept of hallucinations. These refer to totally bogus answers provided to questions asked of AI.

I thought I would check out how likely these are. So, I asked ChatGPT about the East Suffolk Light Railway. That was my search term, nothing more or less. There was no such thing. There was an East Suffolk Railway, and a Mid Suffolk Light Railway, but no East Suffolk Light Railway. I got this answer:

The East Suffolk Light Railway (ESLR) was a narrow-gauge railway in East Anglia, England, that operated between 1887 and 1929. The railway was built to provide a transport link between the agricultural areas of east Suffolk and the Great Eastern Railway mainline at Woodbridge.

The railway was initially built as a 3 ft (914 mm) gauge line, but was later converted to a 3 ft 6 in (1,067 mm) gauge to allow for more powerful locomotives to be used. It had a total length of 32 miles (51 km) and connected various towns and villages in the region.

The railway was initially successful, carrying large volumes of agricultural produce and passengers. However, competition from road transport and declining agricultural output led to a decline in traffic, and the railway was eventually closed in 1929.

Today, the route of the railway is mostly used as a footpath and cycleway, known as the East Suffolk Line Walk. Some remnants of the railway, such as stations and bridges, can still be seen along the route.

That is total nonsense. It looks good. It is nicely written. And there is not a shred of truth to it.

So I asked it for another iteration of the same answer. I got this:

The East Suffolk Light Railway was a narrow gauge railway in East Anglia, England, that

operated between 1902 and 1954. The railway ran for 17.5 miles from the market town of Woodbridge to the coastal town of Aldeburgh, passing through several small villages and towns along the way.

The line was originally built to serve the agricultural communities of the area, transporting goods such as grain, sugar beet, and livestock. It also provided a passenger service, carrying local residents and visitors to the seaside resorts of Aldeburgh and Thorpeness

During World War II, the railway played an important role in the transportation of military personnel and supplies to and from the coastal defenses that were built along the Suffolk coast.

After the war, the railway faced increasing competition from road transport, and passenger services were discontinued in 1952. Freight services continued for a few more years, but the railway was finally closed in 1955 and dismantled soon after.

Today, some remnants of the railway can still be seen, including the former station buildings at Woodbridge and Aldeburgh, and some sections of trackbed that have been converted into footpaths and cycleways. The Aldeburgh Station Museum, housed in the original station building, also preserves the history of the railway and its impact on the local area.

That is not only quite different to the first answer, but it too is also complete nonsense. There was a railway to Aldeburgh, but not the one described and all the dates are wrong.

The conclusion? Garbage in, garbage out rules. And nothing generated by AI can be relied on. Instead of coming back saying there was no East Suffolk Light Railway, as it should have done, ChatGPT made up answers.

I know this has nothing directly to do with the usual themes of this site. I offer it to suggest why relying on AI could, right now, be a mistake. It is far from intelligent, unless you think cheating to appease your questioner is intelligent. The posts here will continue to most definitely be written by me.