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From carbon copy paper to AI: 36 years as a reporter for the BBC

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British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

I joined the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as a 22-year-old radio reporter in the city of Cambridge, in the east of England. At the time, I had the intention of becoming another John Cole, the late, great political editor of the BBC. Politics and social issues were what fascinated me. But a chance meeting one spring afternoon with a scientist at the city's famous Laboratory of Molecular Biology changed the direction of my career. I was stunned by what this man had achieved (he would later win a Chemistry Nobel) and committed to becoming a journalist specialising in the reporting of science. This was problematic as I'd had no real science education at school. But seven years with the Open University as a mature student put that right, and in 1998 I found myself in the position of leading the science coverage on the fledgling BBC News website. I've been a full-time science hack ever since. When I started in journalism my tools were a reel-to-reel recorder, a typewriter and several sheets of carbon copy paper to produce my radio scripts in duplicate. Today, as I approach the end of my career, I operate in a fully digital newsroom with mp3 recorders, cloud computing and AI. My medal lecture will detail the journey from the old to the new. I will pass on some of the lessons learned (which should be of interest to those wanting to interact with journalists) and consider some of the challenges ahead for my profession.