

## Hacking

To justify my existence as a newspaper columnist, I've been hacking into historical voice-mails. Apparently this is what we journalists do.

My early efforts - hacking into Tudor mobile phones - were largely unproductive, as people were still wrestling with the technology. Anne Boleyn's voice messages were especially disappointing. All I could hear was Ann's voice in the background saying: "What's this thing and why is it talking to me ? Get me a priest."

Henry VIII's messages too were less revealing than I had hoped. More often than not, when the King attempted to leave a message, an automated voice from the phone company cut in, saying: "You have terminated the holder of this account. Please call his replacement." All I got then was Henry's puzzled musings. "Did I ? When was that ?"

I can reveal, however, that Charles I's mobile phone went off whilst he was on the scaffold outside the Banqueting House, awaiting execution. How embarrassing was that ? "I told you to turn that off !" said the executioner. "Look," said Charles to the unidentified caller, "I'm a bit tied up at the moment. Can I call you back ?"

It seems he never did. Yet he was, I discovered, heartlessly charged by his provider for that final message from the block. A literal example of a "Pay As You Go" account.

Queen Victoria's phone messages were rather more poignant. It appears that for years, whenever she answered the phone, the Queen asked "Is that you, Albert ?" This continued long after the Prince Consort had died. More often than not, the tetchy reply came from one of her many Prime Ministers - Disraeli, Gladstone, Salisbury, or some such. "No, it's me. Have you signed those statutory instruments I faxed you yet ?"

Anyway, for all my use of the "black arts", I failed to find much evidence of secret mistresses and dodgy bank accounts. I found out more about people's network operators than their private lives.

I now know, for example, that William III's network was Orange, and that Lord Nelson had an i-phone, which was created for him after his unfortunate accident at the Battle of Corsica.

Dr Chris Upton denies all the above at Newman University College in Birmingham.