

# Hacker who broke into Duke's computer file found guilty of forgery

A computer hacker who broke into the Duke of Edinburgh's secret computer files was fined £750 yesterday after being found guilty of forgery.

Robert Schifreen, aged 22, a freelance computer journalist, who used the name "Bug Hunter", was accused of leaving messages on the Duke's files.

He claimed at Southwark Crown Court that he broke into the files for the pleasure of seeing the welcome "Good afternoon, HRH Duke of Edinburgh".

Stephen Gold, his co-defendant, was fined £600. Both were ordered to pay £1,000 costs.

Sentencing them, Judge Butler, QC, said: "If you did not know it before, you now know your conduct was criminal conduct."

He added: "Forgery is a very serious offence. It would usually lead me to an immediate sentence of imprisonment but I accept that the facts of

this case are of an unusual nature."

He gave a warning to other would-be computer forgers, saying: "I will not send either of you to prison but that does not mean that anyone else who behaves in the future in the way you behaved can hope the courts will take the same lenient view."

Earlier the court was told that Schifreen and Gold accidentally obtained telephone numbers for private Prestel computers when testing new computer equipment.

Schifreen then found a list of every password allocated to subscribers when access codes to one of the private computers were left lying around.

Schifreen, of Edgwarebury Gardens, Edgware, north London, denied five charges of forgery between November 1984 and February 1985.

Gold, aged 30, an accountant, of Watt Lane, Sheffield, denied four similar charges.

The jury was told how easily Schifreen and Gold gained access to confidential files on

the Prestel system. On a home computer, Schifreen typed out an experimental line of numbers, all twos, when the computer asked for a 10-digit identity code.

It worked and the computer asked for a four-digit password. He typed 1234, which turned out to be a testing file with access to all the Prestel code numbers.

Gold said after the hearing that he was very bitter at being treated as a criminal. He said: "They should be employing people like me to plug gaps in the system." Schifreen said: "I'm disgusted at the verdict."

British Telecom said: "Security has been tightened considerably."

It was also disclosed outside the court that subscribers whose confidential electronic files had been tampered with will be able to sue British Telecom under the Data Protection Act. Section 23, which covers security of information, is backdated to cover breaches in the system to September 12, 1984.

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