

Computer messages 'went to Palace'

By a Staff Reporter

Computer hackers left messages for the Duke of Edinburgh in his secret electronic mailbox, a court was told yesterday. They were signed by someone calling himself M Hacker, it was said.

But a journalist accused of plugging into the information system denied that he was the culprit, the hearing was told.

Robert Schifreen, aged 22, got into a Prestel information account held by the Prince when he discovered the confidential royal identity number and password, it was alleged.

Schifreen is said to have told police: "I found codes belonging to the Duke of Edinburgh and logged in as him, simply for the pleasure of seeing the welcome frame come up saying "Good afternoon, this is HRH Duke of Edinburgh".

Asked if he sent any messages purporting to be the Prince, he replied: "No".

"There were reports in the press at the time that messages had been sent purporting to be from an M Hacker," he added.

"That wasn't me, and I don't know to this day who did it."

He admitted to police logging on to the Prestel system as the Prince, but added: "I didn't then use that account to do anything. I just logged off then logged back into the system as the Duke of Edinburgh."

Schifreen, whose Prestel account name was Bug Hunter, accidentally obtained telephone numbers for private Prestel computers when he was testing new equipment, the court heard.

Then he found a list of every ID number and password allocated to subscribers when access codes to one of the private computers were "left lying around" within the system, Mr Austen Issard-Davies, for the prosecution, said.

Schifreen, of Edgwarebury Gardens, Edgware, north-west London, denies five charges of forgery.

It is alleged that he passed on the computer information to Stephen Gold, aged 33, of Watt Lane, Sheffield, who denies four similar charges.

The trial continues.

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