

Easy when you **Know How**



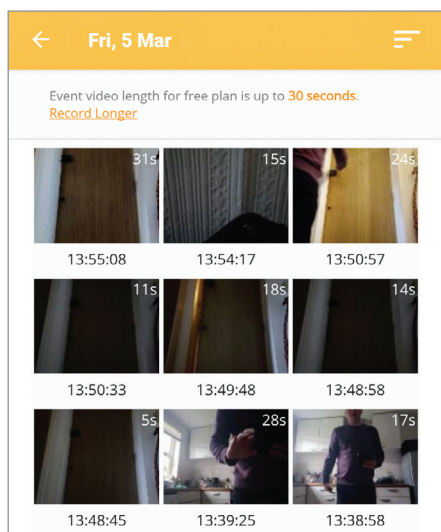
Worried by things that go bump in the night, **Robert Irvine** grabs an old phone and tries to...

Set up a surveillance camera

Regular readers of this column, or those of you who accidentally skim the first line while flicking to Jargon Buster, will recall that in Issue 597 I was complaining about noisy pipes in my block of flats. That problem has been fixed thanks to Dave the plumber, but now I have a new audio dilemma: my home is too quiet at night.

This domestic silence means that every tiny sound – a rumble from the boiler, a gurgle in the fridge – is significantly amplified, and I lie awake at 3am convinced that burglars are fiddling with my water pressure and eating my cheese. More seriously, they could be stealing my wallet, laptop, kettle and other valuables, while I'm in my bedroom unsure if the imagined invaders are human, rodent or draught.

To allay my nocturnal unease, I decided to set up a security camera. A quick browse of Amazon found surveillance devices for as little as £20, but as you can't put a price on peace of mind, I preferred to avoid paying anything. I'd often read about how easy – and eco-friendly! – it is to convert a spare smartphone into a security cam, so I dug out my ancient (2017) Moto E4 and



The free version of Alfred records 30-second clips of motion events

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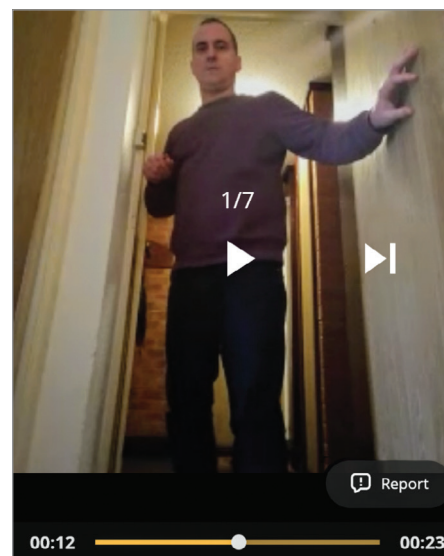
charged it up ready for a second life.

My first step was to choose a suitable home-surveillance app. Based on numerous glowing reviews and the fact that it's free, I chose a service called Alfred (<https://alfred.camera>). This is named after Batman's butler, presumably because it's efficient, loyal and discreet, and knows how to deal with robbin'.

I installed Alfred on my current Android phone (it's also available for iOS) and on my old phone, after solving the conundrum of how to get the app on a handset without a SIM (use Wi-Fi, stupid!). After signing in using my Google account on my main phone, which I'll call phone A, I did the same on phone B and granted Alfred permission to use the camera and microphone.

The two devices were instantly connected, with phone A – the Viewer – displaying a live video stream of what phone B – the Camera – could currently see. I was amazed by the speed and simplicity of the setup process, especially as it hadn't cost me a penny.

Alfred then asked me to turn on Motion Detection for phone B, so the app could record movement automatically, and make sure the feature was working properly. I tested this by propping the phone on a table in another room and walking in front of the camera. A 'thunk' sound indicated that a recording had



Have you seen this man? Robert's been caught on camera by Alfred

been triggered and when I returned to phone A, I was able to watch a video of the captured 'event'. I also noticed that I'd missed a bit at the back when I cut my own hair recently, leaving an embarrassing ducktail.

Usefully, Alfred stores 30-second event videos for up to seven days, so you can leave it running while you're on holiday (when that's allowed again). It also lets you view live streams on your PC via its Web Viewer (<https://alfred.camera/webapp>). You can also switch between phone B's rear and front cameras, activate low-light mode and play a loud burglar-scaring siren, using one-tap controls on phone A. I wasn't so keen on the large ads at both ends, but you can remove these (and extend the time limits) by upgrading to the Premium version for £27.46 a year.

With Alfred duly mastered, I set up phone B in my hall and have left the app running overnight for the last week. No intruders have been caught so far, but I'm sleeping more peacefully knowing that Alfred's got my back – ducktail and all.

✉ Need help setting up your own home-surveillance system?
Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk