



BEEP: I'd like to get through at least one lunch/dinner/social occasion without somebody's pocket or handbag vibrating with an intrusive ringtone

I'm a technophobe and I'm OK

MAKE no bones about it, I'm a lifelong technophobe not a hoot 'n' a holler off James Thurber's mother who believed that electricity leaked out of the sockets in the night.

Not only am I incapable of operating anything more than two switches (preferably ON and OFF) I'm not remotely interested in gizmos, gadgets and multitasking appliances. Nor have I anything but pity for people who walk about, one hand permanently welded to their smartphone, declaring with misplaced pride: "My whole life's in that phone." I'd like to get through at least one lunch/dinner/social occasion without somebody's pocket or handbag vibrating with an intrusive ringtone and conversation having to be suspended while they feel duty-bound (nay, compelled) to answer it.

On the very rare occasion it's my handbag that's ringing, the concerted response of the company is: "Aren't you going to answer that?" Only if it's a matter of life, death, emergency or the National Lottery.

Such occurrences are rare. My phone might lie doggo at the bottom of my bag for days, haemorrhaging power. I do not wish to be instantly accessible to any but family, close friends, people issuing attractive invitations or asking me to write – for which I have a perfectly serviceable landline with an answering machine. "Aren't you afraid of missing out?" they ask. On what, precisely? Prosaic texts, moronic jokes, irrelevant photographs and footage of people doing daft things? No.

My favourite occupation when "OUT out" is people-watching. A new social code has evolved. Look at this young couple who've just come into the restaurant. Shown to their table, they take their seats in

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perfectly synchronised unison, each places their mobile phone to the right of the soup spoon. After a few verbal exchanges, they take up their phones and, heads bowed, thumbs busy, they text all their friends. This goes on until their food arrives. Then they photograph their dinner and send 'to all'. Subsequently, a series of 'beeps' heralds their friends' texted responses. Between forkfuls of food, each shows the other the texts. A loud and discordant ringtone pierces the discreet chatter of the other diners. It's his phone. He rises from his seat and wends his way through the tables talking loudly to his friend Tony. She takes the opportunity of his absence to text all her friends – again. On her swain's return she summons a waiter and hands him

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her phone. "Would you take a photo of us?" she asks. He obliges. They lean in with raised glasses and wide smiles. Click. They send the photograph 'to all'.

Going to the cinema is another social hazard. An impetigo rash of twinkling blue lights pocks the darkness throughout the main feature, accompanied by the subdued beeps of arriving texts. Why pay to see a film and not give it full attention? A woman in front of me played *Candy Crush* all through the trailers of coming attractions. Nowhere is nuisance-free.

Unforgivably, the odd ringtone interrupts a classical concert but the culprit at least has the grace to be mortified. One isn't even safe on the streets from idiots simultaneously walking and texting. There was a girl on the Belfast bus last week describing (graphically and audibly) to a friend on her phone, an argument she'd had with her boyfriend. Proximity meant I couldn't but hear it. I had an overwhelming urge to tap her on the shoulder and say: "Leave it, love. He's not worth it." I was quite disappointed when she got off at Maghera. I'll never know now whether or not they ever made up.

I'll grudgingly admit there are times when possession of a mobile phone is useful.

Daughter Dear rings on my landline to say she's spotted a little something online I might fancy. "Get your mobile and I'll show you," she instructs, posting me pictures of pretty things. Landline phone in one hand, mobile (alarmingly low in juice) in the other, I'm frogmarched through the process of retrieving them. What a palaver! It rarely ends well. She gets impatient at my ineptitude and I get fractious. "You're HOPELESS Mumma..." True... and not one whit repentant.

ON THIS DAY

JUNE 22 1921

Priest Condemns Murders

FOLLOWING the recent tragedies in Dundalk there was a good deal of subdued excitement and tension in the town. The funeral of the brothers Watters, who were killed [by armed men who called at their home], took place on Sunday to St Patrick's Cemetery. The mother of the deceased was a pathetic figure as she was helped across the road. She had implored the raiders to shoot her instead of her sons and she followed them when they dragged off her boys, being within a few yards when they were shot. She then ran to the Redemptorist Monastery close by and obtained the spiritual assistance of two of the priests for her two dead sons. The funeral procession was attended by about 3,000 people of all classes. Preaching in Dundalk yesterday, Rev James McKeone, Adm. deplored and condemned the killings. It was all very well for young people, their minds filled with enthusiasm and patriotism to think in order to achieve their aims that they are justified in taking human life as an act of war. To take away life is a usurpation of the authority of God...

Fermanagh Gerrymandering

To the Editor
SIR – There may dwell here and there a few people who are denied the necessities of life, hungry, because the British Local Government Board hold up the grants ... I would like to record briefly the experiences of the County Council of Fermanagh within the past few months. Fermanagh is one of the big 'Six'. It has a Nationalist majority on the County Council. Three of its District Councils have had a Nationalist majority and two a Unionist majority.

When the Local Government Board has finished 'arranging' the county, two District Councils will have ceased to exist and, of the remaining three, the Unionists will control two and the Nationalist majority will be in possession of one. This is how the Board has gerrymandered Fermanagh. ... The Carsonites wanted a political job done and the 'playboys' of the Local Government Board... were willing to oblige them. When, however, Derry Number Two District Council (Donegal), on being transferred to Letterkenny, asked for an inquiry it was at once granted. This council was Unionist – that's why. Signed Cahir Healy, Enniskillen.

AS KING George V set sail for Belfast to open the Northern Parliament, violence continued to rage; in Dundalk the IRA was suspected of these murders. Meanwhile Cahir Healy (1877-1970), Fermanagh Sinn Féin leader and future Nationalist MP, revealed that the process of gerrymandering anti-partitionist councils in the North had already begun – even before Craig had taken steps to abolish PR for local elections.

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