

21st December 2009

Sir

Abolition of cheques

John Griffiths (letters, December 21) experienced a cheque fraud and received an immediate refund. This suggests to him that cheques are no safer than online transactions.

His experience has shown him only half the picture, however. If his bank's systems showed an online transaction to have been made using his security credentials, even though he had not used them, he is most unlikely to receive an immediate refund, and far more likely to be accused of carelessness with his credentials. But can he really be sure that the bank's computers are always right?

In the case of cheques, the evidence is there for all to see. Forged handwriting is almost always obvious on skilled examination.

In the case of online transactions the evidence lies buried in complex banking software which the banks will not allow outsiders to examine. The customer has in practice an almost impossible task if he wants to challenge the banks over the security of their systems, even though the law is plain that the burden of proof is supposed to fall on the banks.

For payers by cheque, handwriting remains a better protection against forgery than online banking can offer, however much more convenient it may be.

Yours faithfully,

Nicholas Bohm