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Phil Jump reflects on Sir Tim Berners-Lee's concerns for the internet 30 years after its invention

I admit to finding it somewhat disconcerting when I arrived at a recent meeting of the Industrial Christian Fellowship, to be told by several fellow-participants that they knew exactly where I'd been for the preceding couple of hours. One showed me an image on their smartphone, taken in the lobby of a hotel, where I'd taken advantage of being in the area and arranged to meet the vice-president of our Baptist Union.

Had this been foretold 50 years ago, observers might be forgiven for assuming that this was indeed the manifestation of George Orwell's "Big Brother" dystopia, and that I had somehow fallen victim to the omnipresent state surveillance that he imagined. Yet the reality was that this was an entirely voluntary act,

participating in the social media normality of sharing our pictures, emojis, meetings, locations, experiences, thoughts, reactions, expectations and so on. My colleague is particularly social media savvy, and by the time I arrived at my next appointment, he had already informed his many followers of his appreciation of the time we spent together.

George Orwell was certainly right in his anticipation of the power of technology, and no-one would deny that not only is it now possible to connect every room in our houses to a single web of communication and potential surveillance, but many of our homes and offices have most or all of it in place. This is the emerging world of what is coming to be known as the "internet of things". When we

recently replaced our domestic washing machine, the manual informed us that even this can be connected to our home internet, and by downloading the relevant app I can use my phone to switch it on and off. (What no manual can explain to me is why on earth I would want to control a washing machine when I am too far away to empty or fill it.)

What Orwell was less successful at predicting was the nature of human behaviour and interaction; rather than being imposed by some totalitarian state, this growing tendency to place an account of our daily comings and goings in the public domain is entirely participant-driven. Having said that, we might also acknowledge the various conspiracy theories beginning to emerge about how our

