Chronicles

September 1991 – March 1992

Four bogus art dealers, apprehended after trying to sell back Pieter Breughel's 'Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery' (valued at £3 million) to the gallery from which it was stolen eight years ago, plead guilty to conspiring to handle stolen goods; *The Independent*, 20 August 1991. — 20 August 1991

Thirty eight leading figures representing Dutch museums, universities and kindred institutions petition the Crown of the Netherlands to prohibit the planned deaccessioning and sale of two Picasso paintings from the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague. Mrs Hedy d'Ancona, the Dutch Minister of Culture, later announces her decision to prohibit the disposal: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 14 Jan. 1992. — 12 September 1991

Man damages Michelangelo's David with hammer: *The Observer*, 15 September 1991. — 14 September 1991

Three gold tassels, believed to be part of the lost 'Treasure of Priam' excavated by Heinrich Schliemann at Troy, returned to the Berlin Museum from which they were originally looted by the Russians in 1945: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 14, January 1992. — 15 September 1991

Panamanian Government gives permission for the return of the remains of Sir Francis Drake from its coastal waters to Britain: *The Times*, 16 September 1991. — 16 September 1991

Photographs of all of the Dead Sea scrolls made available to the public for the first time by Huntingdon Library despite threats of legal action from the Israeli Government and the cartel of scholars in control of the scrolls since their discovery: *The Times*, 21 September 1991 and 23 September 1991, *The Independent*, 23 September 1991. — 23 September 1991

Legal action by the Dutch Government leads to the recovery of a major Rubens oil sketch fifty years after its acquisition by the Nazis: *The Independent*, 27 September 1991. — 27 September 1991

Scientists from across Europe gather at the University of Innsbruck to view the body of Similaun Man. The preserved corpse, estimated to be four thousand years old, was found ten days earlier in a ridge of the Otztaler Alps on the border between Austria and Italy: *Sunday Times*, 29 September 1991. — 29 September 1991

Contest reported to be imminent as to entitlement to custody of the Similaun Man. The claimants are reported to be the Italian and

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Austrian governments and Tirolean regional authorities. Controversy centres on the location of the body when found, an Italian climber claiming that this was twenty to thirty metres on the Italian side of the frontier: *The Observer*, 29 September 1991.

1 October 1991 Right-Wing Jewish group claims unauthorized excavation and construction on the Temple Mount, Jerusalem has damaged or covered up important archaeological remains: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 11, October 1991.

2 October 1991 Jordan claims ownership of the Dead Sea scrolls discovered forty years ago in what was then part of its territory *The Times*, 2 October 1991.

3 October 1991 Yugoslavian national claims he has conclusive evidence that the Sevso treasure hoard, currently held by a New York Court pending determination of claims by Yugoslavia, Hungary and Lebanon, was definitely found in Yugoslavia. *The Times*, 3 October 1991, *The Art Newspaper*, No. 11 October 1991.

5 October 1991 Russian judges grant request by the Brooklyn-based Lubavitch movement of traditional Jews for the return of 12,000 historic texts from Moscow's Lenin Library: *The Times*, 5 October 1991.

7 October 1991 Arson cause of fire in art warehouse near London Heathrow which destroyed £100 million worth of art works: *The Independent* 9 October 1991, *The Times*, 10 October 1991 and 12 October 1991.

10 October 1991 Italian scientists claim that the 'miracle' of Saint Januarius in Naples cathedral whereby the congealed blood of the Saint liquifies was created by a medieval alchemist from a mix of chemicals and other substances available around Naples: *The Independent*, 10 October 1991.

12 October 1991 The jaw of St Anthony of Padua, set in a cup of gold and precious stones, stolen at gun point by three masked men from the Basilica of St Anthony at Padua: *The Times*, 12 October 1991.
Tomb of Tutankhamun's tutor discovered at Akhmin, some two hundred and thirty miles south of Cairo on the right bank of the Nile: *The Times*, 12 October 1992.

14 October 1991 Geographical and seismological research by US scientists on the Great Sphinx at El Giza indicates it may be 2,500 years older than previously believed: *The Independent*, 14 October 1991.

19 October 1991 Discovery of 10,000 – 12,000 year old wall paintings and engravings of animals and scenes from everyday life of the artists in underwater grotto at Cassis, Southern France: *The Times*, 19 October 1991.

21 October 1991 British Master forger, Eric Hebborn, confesses to having put more than one thousand fake Old Master Drawings on the market over a period of thirty years: *The Independent* 21 October 1991, *The Times*, 21 October 1991.

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25 October 1991

Widespread international concern expressed at the threat to historic monuments and sites posed by the Yugoslav Federal army's shelling of Dubrovnik and by military operations elsewhere in Yugoslavia. Officials at the Zagreb National Museum estimate that, of the two hundred and twenty four registered monuments in Croatia, two hundred and fourteen have been exposed to military fire, about half sustaining destruction or severe damage: *The Times*, 25 October 1991.

29 October 1991

Exact replica (dating from eighteenth or nineteenth century) of Britain's only known substantial piece of Roman period silver church plate is identified following its delivery to Seaby's in London by a member of the family who have owned it for several generations. The original, dating from the fourth century AD, was found by a ploughman in a field in Derbyshire in 1729 and broken up. Although believed to have been reassembled by the landowner, Lady Aston, it later vanished and remains untraced: *The Independent*, 29 October 1991.

30 October 1991

Renoir's 'A Vase of Flowers', stolen from Wildenstein's Bond St Gallery four years previously, is tendered for valuation at Wildenstein's Tokyo gallery and retained by gallery staff. Lawyers acting for the Lloyd's underwriters (who insured the picture and indemnified Wildenstein for the loss) obtain a court order to impound the picture pending determination of its current ownership: *The Times*, 30 November 1992.

31 October 1991

The National Heritage Memorial Fund, acting for the National Trust, pays £2,000,000 for Chastleton House, a Jacobean house in Oxfordshire virtually unaltered since its construction: *The Independent*, 31 October 1991.

The Greek Ambassador to Britain and Jocelyn Stevens, Rector of the Royal College of Art, jointly open an exhibition of models for a new museum at Athens. The museum is designed to afford an integrated home for all artefacts pertaining to the Acropolis, including (if they ever return to Greece) the Elgin Marbles. Graham Binns, Deputy Chairman of the British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles, claims that this development fortifies the case for their return: *The Independent*, 31 October 1991.

1 November 1991

Thieves who stole twenty Van Gogh paintings from the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam on 14 April 1991 sentenced to imprisonment: *The Independent*, 1 November 1991.

British Museum acquires Jan van de Velde's 'A Farmhouse on the Banks of a River' with the assistance of a £6,000 contribution from the National Art Collections Fund, and Ludovico Garacci's 'The Infant Christ, the Virgin and Saint Joseph': *The Independent*, 1 November 1991.

4 November 1991

First Viking shipwreck to be discovered in British waters found off the south-west coast of Wales, *The Independent*, 4 November 1991.

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5 November 1991 — Rose Theatre Trust revealed to have raised only £15,000 of the £75,000 needed to conduct research into the most satisfactory means of preserving the remains of the Tudor playhouse and rendering them accessible to the public: *The Independent*, 5 November 1991.

6 November 1991 — Berlin court refuses to grant an injunction restraining removal of the Berlin statue of Lenin, thereby reversing a temporary injunction granted by the Berlin Justice Ministry on the application of relatives of the Soviet designer of the statue. The court based its decision on the absence of adequate proof that the applicants were the designer's true heirs: *The Independent*, 6 November 1991.

9 November 1991 — Newly-drafted Bill for presentation to United Kingdom Parliament purports to grant national museums and galleries enhanced powers to alienate objects from their collections: *The Independent*, 9 November 1991.

Robert Eisenman, Professor of Middle East Religions at California State University at Long Beach and first scholar to be granted access to the newly-released text of the Dead Sea Scrolls, claims they reveal the existence of an ancient Jewish sect sharing the Christian belief in the execution of the Messiah: *The Times*, 9 November 1991.

11 November 1991 — Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney opens to house the Power Collection: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 14, January 1992.

Thieves break miniature sixteenth century altar framing Annibale Fontana's relief 'The Flagellation of Christ' during attempted theft at Victoria and Albert Museum, London: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 14, January 1992.

15 November 1991 — Jean Dondeligner, EC Commissioner for Culture, reports that his department has yet to finalise its proposed rules on export and restitution of illegally removed art treasures within the EC. He undertakes that a draft will be received by ministers of culture for the member states before Christmas. The United Kingdom Minister for the Arts confirms that the proposals will not be retrospective and will not affect the legal position of the Elgin Marbles: *The Times*, 15 November 1991.

16 November 1991 — Iraq completes return of Islamic and archaeological treasures removed from Kuwait's National Museum during the Gulf War: *The Independent*, 16 November 1991.

Archaeologists find 'High Street, Londinium' the main Roman road through London, beneath well preserved remains of Saxon buildings near Cheapside in the City: *The Times*, 16 November 1991.

James Beck, Professor of Art History at Columbia University, acquitted in Florence on criminal slander charges arising from his criticisms of the restoration and cleaning of Jacopo della Quercia's tomb of Ilaria Del Carretto: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 14, January 1992.

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Joan Solana, Mayor of Banyoles near Barcelona, declines to remove from public display the stuffed body of a Bechuana tribesman, in response to demands from Dr Alfonso Arcelin, a Haitian-born Spaniard resident at Cambrils, who threatens to call for an African boycott of the Olympic rowing competitions at Banyoles. The Mayor promises a full 'technical' study of the question: *The Times*, 16 November 1991.

Boris Yeltsin says he knows the whereabouts of the Amber Chamber looted from the imperial palace near St. Petersburg by the Nazis during World War 2: *The Times*, 23 November 1991, *The Sunday Times*, 24 November 1991. — 22 November 1991

Luigi Covatta, Under-Secretary of State at the Italian Ministry of Culture, announces proposals for Italian legislation to extend from six months to ten years the maximum period during which museums may loan cultural objects (mainly archaeological items) overseas: *The Times*, 23 November 1991. — 23 November 1991

Hundreds of priceless artefacts which had been stolen from the ancient Roman town of Herculaneum in 1990 recovered from a farm near Volla, Italy: *The Independent*, 27 November 1991. — 27 November 1991

Art experts authenticate previously unknown painting as the only existing portrait of Christopher Columbus painted during his lifetime: *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 November 1991.

Discovery by the National Gallery, London of a forgotten painting by Raphael in the collection of the Duke of Northumberland estimated to be worth between £20 million and £30 million: *The Times*, 30 November 1991, *The Art Newspaper*, No. 14, January 1992. — 30 November 1991

Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, appeals for $100,000,000 to save the Angkor temple complex in central Cambodia, symbol of the Khmer civilisation, from destruction threatened by environmental pollution, discarded land mines, tourism, irrigation, cultural pillaging and the encroachment of jungle: *Malay Mail*, 6 December 1991. — 6 December 1991

Scientists at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Centre and the Denver Museum of Science unveil three-dimensional pictures of two 3000 year old Egyptian mummies on loan from the Rosemont Victorian House in Pueblo. The necessary 'unwrapping' of the mummies takes place without any removal of their covering fabric, by means of a computerised topography ('CT') machine. The 'non-invasive' process produces high-resolution images capable of detecting bone, skin, sharp edges and even contours of the enfolding linen: *Malay Mail*, 6 December 1991.

German archaeologists claim that the battle in which Arminius, chief of the Cheruscis, annihilated three Roman legions and auxiliary troops in 9 AD occurred not at Teutoberg Forest near Detmold in Germany (as traditionally believed) but some eighty kilometres to the North at a site near Osnabrueck: *Malay Mail*, 6 December 1991.

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20 December 1991 Twenty five people have appeared before the Instructing Magistrate at Besancon, France, charged with fraud and forgery in connection with the production of fake Diego Giacometti furniture and sculpture: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 14, January 1992.

28 December 1991 Curators at the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg report severe economic crisis accompanied by declining staff morale, shortage of conservation resources, deteriorating security systems and an absence of insurance provision to enable the Museum to make overseas loans: *International Herald Tribune*, 28–29 December 1991.

1 January 1992 Italian Senator presents bill in Parliament to liberalise circulation abroad of Italian archaeological items not on permanent exhibit by allowing their loan on a long term basis to museums, universities and research bodies: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 14, January 1992.
The Romanian Government acknowledges that certain Brancusi sculptures appropriated by the Government in 1949 belong to the heirs of Victor N Popp, a private collector, and are not the property of the Muzeul de Arta in Craiova, where they have been lodged for the past thirty years: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 14, January 1992.

3 January 1992 Under auspices of the Besso Foundation, masterpieces from the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg (not seen outside Russia for the past two hundred years) go on view at the Palazzo Ruspoli in Rome. The works include eleven sculptures by Antonio Canova, and the Farsetti collection of about sixty sixteenth and seventeenth century terracottas: *The Times*, 3 January 1992.
Joint British/Libyan archaeological survey of Roman remains in the north Sahara finds evidence of a flourishing agricultural region during the Roman empire maintained by sophisticated methods of floodwater farming: *The Times*, 3 January 1992.

4 January 1992 Police suspect that three sixteenth century paintings, stolen from St Donat's Church at Llantwit Major in South Wales between December 29th and the New Year, were stolen 'to order' on behalf of a private collector. Norfolk police decide to make the detection of crimes against churches a priority in 1992, following a 40% increase in arson attacks: *The Independent*, 4 January 1992.

10 January 1992 Senior Shia cleric in Iraq claims priceless Islamic jewels and ancient manuscripts were looted from Najaf's Shia shrine by the Iraqi army following the suppression of the Shia rebel uprising in March 1991: *The Independent*, 10 January 1992.

14 January 1992 Germany's Thuringia State abandons its search for the Amber Chamber: *The Independent*, 15 January 1992.

15 January 1992 European Commission publishes long-awaited proposals on the restitution of stolen treasures in the European Community: *The Times*, 16 January 1992.
George Garkusha, marketing director-general of the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, announces the publication of limited-

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edition reproductions of works by Van Gogh, Monet, Pisdarro, Cezanne, Bonnard and Derain from the Museum's collection: *The Times*, 15 Janauary 1992.

Government of Victoria, Australia, offers reward of $250,000 Australian for the discovery of a ship sighted in shifting sands. The ship, possibly dating from 1552, may have been part of a Portuguese expedition which anticipated by two centuries Captain James Cook's supposed discovery of Australia: *The Times*, 16 January 1992. — 16 January 1992

Egyptian Museum at Cairo reopens its mummy room to public, amid controversy as to ethical legitimacy of exhibiting human remains: *The Independent on Sunday*, 19 January 1992. — 19 January 1992

Five statues, collectively valued at over £100,000, are stolen from the grounds of Powys Castle in Wales, the forty-third documented theft from National Trust property within a four week period and a suspected example of the trend towards 'designer robberies': *The Independent*, 1 February 1992. — 1 February 1992

Two eighteenth century Chinese porcelain figurines are to be returned to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford following the conviction of John Q Feller, an American history professor at Scranton University, Pennsylvania, for theft in December 1991. Feller claimed to be motivated not by prospects of gain but by a desire to liberate items from storage in basements and other obscure places. The figurines (the theft of which was unknown to Museum staff till they were contacted by the FBI) are to be returned to the basement: *The Independent*, 9 February 1992. — 9 February 1992

Similaun Man shown by carbon dating to date from pre-Bronze Age, at least one thousand years earlier than the four thousand years previously estimated. Stuart Needham of the British Museum describes the find as 'stunning ... a man in a time capsule, going about his everyday life – the sort of information we rarely get': *The Times*, 10 February 1992. — 10 February 1992

Remains of some five thousand soldiers killed at the Battle of Fontenoy 1745 discovered in southern Belgium. Archaeologists disinter sixty skeletons: *The Times*, 10 February 1992.

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, retiring Chairman of English Heritage, calls on the European Community to endow a foundation responsible for protecting the historic towns and buildings of Eastern Europe: *The Times*, 20 February 1992. — 20 February 1992

Admission to an exhibition of works of art in southern Czechoslovakia, which includes a crucifixion scene, has been limited to visitors aged over eighteen at the insistence of local Roman Catholic priests, who claim the pictures are obscene. The offending works of art have been covered: *The Times*, 20 February 1992.

Oldest remnant of early man discovered to exist in the form of a fragment of fossilised bone from the side of a skull, found in Kenya

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twenty-five years ago. The fragment, formerly thought to come from an ape-like relative of early human life, is two million four hundred thousand years old, half a million years older than the oldest specimen previously confirmed as belonging to the Homo group: *The Independent*, 20 February 1992.

21 February 1992 Royal grave dating from the late Iron age, possibly the last resting place of Andocus of the Catuvellauni or his co-ruler Tasciobanus (the father of Cunobelin, Shakespeare's Cymbeline and Old King Cole) is excavated at St Albans, Hertfordshire. The two thousand year old grave, located in part of the grounds of St Albans hospital soon to be developed by a housing association, lies alongside a Romano-Celtic temple built after the interment. It is the largest Iron Age tomb found in Britain and yields a great variety of objects, including the burnt remains of six hundred skeletons: *The Times*, 21 February 1992.

22 February 1992 Judge J Owen Todd of the Middlesex Superior Court, Boston, Massachusetts, awards James Huntington, a New York sculptor, damages equivalent to £27,000 under the Massachusetts Art Preservation Act 1985 for the loss of three granite slabs (market value £525) by the Fletcher Granite Company, who were storing the slabs. One of the slabs (which the sculptor had cut into for the purpose of fixing a steel piece) had been worked upon and thus constituted a work of art within the statute. The others had not be worked on and did not thus qualify: *The Independent*, 22 February 1992.

Bronze bust of Adolf Hitler dating from 1932, reportedly removed from a Germany Army headquarters at the end of the second World War and brought to England by a member of a West Country regiment, entered for sale in Devonshire. Auctioneers report keen interest from South America: *The Times*, 22 February 1992.

Independent carbon dating tests, performed at Oxford University and at the Technische Hochschule at Zurich, confirm that the mummified 'Similaun' corpse found in an Alpine glacier in autumn 1991 is that of a Neolithic man who dies some five thousand three hundred years ago: *The Independent*, 22 February 1992.

Graham Greene, Chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission, states in a letter to Tim Renton, United Kingdom Minister for the Arts, that he 'cannot emphasise too strongly the destructive effect of the continuing lack of action to address effective reform of our export control procedures'. The warning follows the minister's announcement in December 1991 that he was considering the promulgation of a list of paramount items of cultural property, whose export from the United Kingdom would be prohibited. After the announcement, several important works of art belonging to owners in the United Kingdom (including Holbein's 'Lady with a Squirrel and a Starling' owned by Lord Cholmondeley) were consigned for sale.

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Thief who walked away from Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery with a study for 'The Death of Chatterton' by Henry Wallis under his arm, and later tried to sell it to fellow passengers on a bus, is invited by its Keeper of Art to make a return visit to the gallery following receipt of a twelve month conditional discharge from Birmingham magistrates: *The Times*, 24 February 1992. — 24 February 1992

Churches in Venice proposing to open only once a day for Mass from April, in response to increased pillaging of church property and reduced funding for watchmen: *The Times*, 24 February 1992.

Bronze bust of Hitler removed from Germany towards end of second World War bought at auction for £4,235 by a private German archive: *The Times*, 25 February 1992. — 25 February 1992

United Kingdom Minister for the Arts criticised for his announcement that he is contemplating a proposal to list certain works of art of special national significance as incapable of export. His critics maintain that the announcement has precipitated a stampede of owners, anxious to sell before the proposals become law: *The Times*, 27 February 1992.

In a letter to The Times, the United Kingdom Minister for the Arts questions the accuracy of claims that owners of important works of art are hastening to sell them overseas so as to pre-empt proposals to create a national list of safeguarded treasures. The minister declares an open mind on this question and observes that a list of retained items is merely one of the available options. Comments are invited from interested parties before the end of March: *The Times*, 29 February 1992. — 29 February 1992

Leader column in The Times contends that pressures from the European Community and the diminution of national museum and gallery purchase grants are subverting the satisfactory operation of the Waverley system of export controls in the United Kingdom: *The Times*, 29 February 1992.

Lord Norwich doubts reports of extensive church closures in Venice following increased theft of artistic and ecclesiastical treasures: *The Times*, 29 February 1992.

The Rose Theatre is scheduled as an ancient monument, following a request by the site owners: *The Times*, 29 February 1992.

First international conference dedicated to the means of preserving the Sphinx opens at Giza, Egypt, convened by Dr Zahi Awass, Director of the Giza Plateau area: *The Times*, 29 February 1992.

Indian Government announces plans to prohibit new industries in the vicinity of the Taj Mahal, following concern that the dome is becoming yellow with industrial pollution: *The Times*, 29 February 1992.

Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia wins European Museum of the Year Award 1991: *EMYA News*, Spring 1992. — 1 March 1992

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Fifteen metre high granite statue of Ramesses II (1279–1212 BC) discovered by workmen in Akhmim, Egypt: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 16, March 1992.
First issue of French and English catalogue of stolen art works published in Paris: *The Art Newspaper*, No. 16, March 1992.

6 March 1992 Sir Denis Mahon describes proposal to list certain works of art as non-exportable from the United Kingdom as 'tantamount to legalised theft' if unaccompanied by compensation based on international market value: *The Times*, 6 March 1992.

8 March 1992 African diplomats in Madrid warn of possible boycott of summer Olympics unless the stuffed body of a Kalahari bushman, on display since 1916 at the Museum of Natural History at Banyoles, is removed from public display: *The Observer*, 8 March 1992.

10 March 1992 A collection of ancient Near Eastern jewellery valued at £50,000 is stolen from the Draper's Gallery, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Policy believe that the items were possibly stolen by thieves 'working to order' and that they may have also been responsible for the theft of a £15,000 painting from the Christchurch Gallery, Oxford, in the previous week. *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 March 1992.

21 March 1992 Scientists at Manchester Museum use fragments of tissue from six Egyptian mummies to establish kinship and manner of death: *The Times*, 21 March 1992.

24 March 1992 Richard Feigen, the New York art dealer, sues Vera Hildenbrand, art deal of San Francisco, alleging that she deceived him into loaning Henri Rousseau's 'La Petite Carmagnole' to a private museum in Japan. Feigen (who claims to have received no money for the picture) maintains that he was induced to part with it on the strength of Hildenbrand's assertion that the museum was planning to buy it and that she was the museum's agent with power to negotiate both loan and sale. The museum, which has possession of the picture, denies knowledge of Feigen's part in the transaction and claims to have acquired in good faith. The museum is reported to have paid £860,000, some £445,000 more than the price allegedly agreed between Hildenbrand and Feigen. Hildenbrand is reported to have admitted that she forged the museum's letterhead and its director's name in a fax to New York confirming the two month loan: *The Independent*, 24 March 1992.
The world's oldest sailing clipper, the 791-ton SV Carrick built in 1864, is raised from the bed of the River Clyde in a £200,000 salvage operation. The ship is the property of the Scottish Maritime Museum and will be put on display in Irvine, Scotland: *The Independent*, 24 March 1992.

29 March 1992 Twenty four antique microscopes, valued at more than £25,000, are stolen from a Leeds college museum: *News of the World*, 29 March 1992.

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