
CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO WHAT'S HOT (AND WHAT'S NOT) IN LAW OFFICE SYSTEMS

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LAW SOCIETY PUTS HSSK ON HOLD

At its December council meeting last Thursday, the English Law Society opted to put the High Street Starter Kit (HSSK) software project on hold, pending the production of a more detailed report on its technical and commercial prospects at the January council meeting.

The Thursday meeting was not a good day for Law Society technology projects, as it began with a review of a sub-committee's highly critical report on the failings of the REGIS membership database, currently best known for its inability to deliver practising certificates on time. Council heard that although the original budget was £2.5million, when the system is finally up and running, it will be four years late and will have cost closer to £10million.

What particularly "dismayed" council members was not only that staff responsible for the project had been "over optimistic" on costs and timescale but also that there had been a "perceived lack of disclosure" to the elected members looking into the budgeting problems.

In the face of these "very real concerns" Law Society secretary general Jane Betts undertook to introduce new budgeting procedures and guidelines on disclosure for Chancery Lane staff to ensure REGIS-type problems would never happen again on major capital projects.

Given the salutary experiences of the REGIS project, it was perhaps not surprising that a decision on whether or not to proceed with the HSSK was put ➡

➡ on hold pending the availability of further and better particulars.

Council did however learn...

- that the project was running behind schedule and would not be commercially available from February 1997;
- that there was currently only one firm involved in piloting the product;
- that an independent consultant's report said substantial additional work would be needed before the software was ready for more advanced field testing (the problems are understood to involve lack of compliance with Law Society *Solicitors Accounts Rules*); and,
- that although the project had already cost £150,000, a further £770,000 would need to be spent to bring it to completion.

Council's view was although the HSSK concept was good in principle and that the Law Society should as a matter of policy be offering more by way of positive assistance to smaller firms and sole practitioners, the HSSK system had to be self-financing.

The council will be considering the commercial viability of the project at its next meeting on the 23rd January.

Janet Macmillan, the principal of the Macmillan Partnership in Ipswich which is currently the only firm piloting the High Street Starter Kit, told **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** that the "concept is excellent" but the present HSSK software "needs more work before it can be relied upon" and is not yet ready to sell to the profession.

The firm is now looking at alternative software solutions from mainstream legal systems suppliers because, in the words of Janet Macmillan: "We have to consider our position. We are a very rapidly ...continued on page 2 ➡"

Gardner & Croft to go with TFB
Canterbury solicitors Gardner & Croft have signed up with Technology for Business (☎ 01932 781120) for the implementation of a major office automation network. The total project involves a spend of £145,000 and along with TFB's accounts and practice management systems, the firm is moving to Windows 95 running Microsoft Office.

☞ The second phase of the project will see Gardner & Croft installing TFB's case management and marketing Partner Peer Le Fleming is also evaluating the Kolvox LawTalk speech recognition system, with a view to using it to drive case management applications.

LINKLATERS FLY THE BLUE FLAG

City of London-based international law firm Linklaters & Paines has unveiled one of the more interesting sites on the Internet, with its "Blue Flag" pages at <http://www.blueflag.com>

Currently the firm's only presence on the World Wide Web, instead of the usual self-congratulatory promotional material most practices put up, the Linklaters site takes the form of a map of Europe with each country (including those in the old communist bloc) pinpointed by a blue flag.

The flags are hypertext links, although only Linklaters clients can access them, leading through to legal, financial, investment and regulatory information that would be of relevance to any business or corporate legal department interested in trade or commercial transactions within those states. The site also provides contact information about the firm's European branches and associates' offices.

☞ **Comment...** In his book *The Future of Law*, Richard Susskind suggests we will see a "productisation" of the law, with instead of firms offering one-off services to individual clients, they will develop "reusable" products that are of equal relevance to many clients. Arguably the Blue Flag is one of the first instances of this new approach. □

PC DOCS GOES CYBER

PC Docs Inc has extended its range of document management software with the launch of CyberDOCS. The new system, which is compatible with Microsoft Explorer and Netscape Navigator, provides users with Web-enabled document management support for the Internet and corporate intranets. Further information is available on <http://www.pcdocs.com> and from PC Doc's UK subsidiary Quintec International (☎ 01268 270601). □

HIGH STREET KIT ON HOLD

☞ *continued from front page...* expanding practice and need to install modern computer technology. We must make contingency arrangements in case (the Law Society) Council abandons the project or else goes ahead but with a completion date that does not fit in with our timescales."

☞ **Comment...** The Law Society seems to be learning at first hand one of the reasons why legal software has such a relatively high price – because it takes so long and costs so much to develop, if it is done properly.

As to the commercial viability of the HSSK, that is something for the council to decide next month – after all it is their hard pressed members' hard earned fees they are spending. However the following figures may be instructive...

On present estimates (and the REGIS experience shows that these may mean nothing) by the time the HSSK is ready for market, there is going to be little change left from £1million. As the Law Society has previously indicated the HSSK will retail for around £2000 (for software only), then merely to break even, Chancery Lane will have to sell around 500 systems.

(In fact taking into account the "cost of selling" – marketing, advertising-time spent on sales demonstrations and roadshows etc, it will probably require nearer 700 to break even.)

In his election campaign earlier this year, Tony Girling pledged to have the system installed in "at least 500 firms in the first year". Maybe they will but one legal IT supplier **LTi** spoke to last week admitted that it had taken his company 18 years to get their system into 500 firms – and many of their users are at the same end of the market the HSSK is targeting.

Peapod Solutions, which launched its own low cost practice management system for High Street firms in September, reports that it is selling systems at the rate of 10 a month. □

LINK WANNABE RIVAL SET FOR FEBRUARY LAUNCH

LawCity, a new Internet-based "club for legal professionals", is set to go live in February, a move which will present LINK with potentially the first serious competition it has had to face in its three year history.

LawCity is an ambitious project being put together by the Current Science Group, publishers of "current awareness" journals for the biomedical and pharmaceutical industries, with the objective of building a "community" of lawyers.

According to CSG's Christopher Gasson, the LawCity site on the World Wide Web will not be just another collection of hypertext links to other legal sites but will contain original material and "information intensive areas" of legal resources.

CSG (☎ 0171 323 0323) also plan to create discussion forums, where practitioners can exchange views on topics of current interest. ☞ This is where the "club" element comes in so CSG could, for example, restrict access to members of the public to prevent forums being cluttered up by people complaining about their latest speeding tickets etc.

CSG has also been talking to a number of legal publishers (including John Pritchard of Legalease/LINK) to see if they would be interested in advertising their products on LawCity. Negotiations are apparently still in progress.

CSG hopes to have its first legal pages on the Web by the 1st February however you can gain some impression of the LawCity format by visiting CSG's club for the biomedical community, which currently has about 40,000 members at <http://www.biomednet.com>

☞ **Comment...** This project has all the hallmarks of the triumph of hope over experience. Most legal publishers already have their own, in some cases very good, Web sites. And, with no shortage of ➡

➡ portmanteau Web sites (such as the Delia Venables pages at <http://www.venables.co.uk/legal/>) freely providing links to publishers and other legal resources, it is hard to see how a project like LawCity can make money, not least because it will have to displace the current UK market leader LINK.

Furthermore, while LINK may have one of the biggest online legal communities in the world, with most of its users only accessing the free services, even its commercial *raison d'être* probably owes more to supporting Legalease's other publishing ventures than as a profit centre in its own right.

☞ **Technical Note...** Legalease has now finally issued beta versions of Link 96 for the Windows 3.1 platform. Although there have been some reports of problems with WINSOCK configuration, the general verdict seems favourable. And, with Microsoft last week releasing the final version of Internet Explorer 3.0 for Windows, the way is now clear for LINK to upgrade in the New Year. ☐

SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT PARTNER WANTED

A legal software house based in the Irish Republic - which describes itself as "a successful developer of a management accounts and time recording system for solicitors on a DOS platform" - is looking for other legal systems suppliers "interested in exploring the possibility of some form of collaboration" to develop existing and possibly new products for the Windows environment.

To-date, the Irish developer has concentrated on systems for small to medium sized firms and it is understood that along with moving its accounts system to Windows, the company is also interested to talk to suppliers of case management software.

For details call Paul Cassidy at the company's market research consultancy NGM on ☎ (00353) 51 381372. ☐

Workflow robot

Case management specialist Solicitec (☎ 0113 278 7757) has launched a new workflow automation feature for its SolCase software. Called the SolCase Robot, the module has been designed to handle routine administrative procedures associated with case management work. Solicitec's Neil Ewin reckons it should save fee earners at least half an hour per day of billable time.

Locoscript upgrade

Fans of the Amstrad PCW might like to note that a new version of the system's Locoscript (☎ 01306 747757) wordprocessing software is now available. Version 4 includes support for colour and multi-column layouts. The RRP is £39.95 with discounts for upgrades from earlier versions.

Need help ?

Windows NT suppliers, help desk software and document comparison systems are just three topics we have been asked about since the last edition.

☞ If you need a phone number, product name, contact point or any other elusive item of information concerning legal technology, just call the Insider Info line on ☎ 01379 687518.

Four more for LSSA

The Legal Software Suppliers Association (LSSA) has admitted four new members: Timeslice Ltd, Technology for Business, Solicitec Computer Systems and Glasgow-based Axiom Business Computers. LSSA can be contacted on ☎ 01789 296096.

DEBT RECOVERY - WHAT ARE FIRMS LOOKING FOR ?

Within the legal software market, debt collection systems are all the rage. But what do the law firms who use these systems think about the technology and does it really meet their needs? Software house Hatton Blue recently conducted a survey on this topic and LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER reports on their findings...

The survey, which was conducted in late November/early December, this year took as its population the 250 largest law firms in England & Wales. The questionnaires were directed at partners in charge of debt collection operations and a total of 72 firms responded.

Asked what they considered to be the major cost in performing this type of work, 83% said staffing, 10% said IT and 3% said accommodation.

On the subject of direct access, when asked if they would consider using electronic communications with major clients to take new instructions and advise on the progress of cases, 75% said "yes" and only 25% rejected the idea. But it should be noted that, although they may recognise the benefits, currently only 9% of firms are communicating electronically with their clients.

When asked to rate on a scale of 1-to-5 (5 = *Very Important*) how important was the ability to provide different or unique routines for handling the recovery of debts for each case or client (as distinct from merely processing them efficiently on a sausage machine basis), there was an unanimous 100% response that it was "Very Important".

The sample were also asked which factors were important in winning new business and/or retaining existing clients. 49% said quality and flexibility of service, 31% said cost of service, 8% said regular client feedback and 8% said bespoke client service.

Asked if they currently used ➡

➡ case management software for debt recovery rather than one of the more rigid dedicated debt collection systems, 35% said "yes" and 65% "no" - although 85% also conceded they could benefit from a more flexible system.

☞ **Comment...** Survey results are always open to different interpretation and with these it would seem that while many users are conscious of their systems' limitations, for the time being they are prepared to get by with their current technology.

For example, 30% of the Hatton Blue sample said they would consider changing their systems over the next six months. This sounds a lot until you consider the age of some of the systems in use: 50% fell into the 1-to-5 years old range, 34% were in the 5-to-10 bracket and an incredible 16% were still running systems that were over 10 years old.

One message to come across loud and clear is that flexibility and the ability to cater for both current and prospective clients' individual debt recovery requirements is now seen as vital. But, whether this will stimulate the demand for case management systems or merely prompt debt collection software suppliers to build more flexibility into their systems remains a moot point. (Hatton Blue is on ☎ 01789 470489.) □

SCL ANNOUNCE SHORTLIST

The Society for Computers & Law has announced a shortlist of 4 entries for its 1997 award for the "most outstanding application of IT to the law". They are: the *Family Finance Toolkit* - a CD-Rom title for FT Law & Tax, the widely used Hexar FaxSwitch system, Exeter solicitors Rundle Walker - for their use of IT, and the FranSys compliance and quality control system for legal aid franchise holders. This is a new Windows 95/NT software package developed by Lexology (☎ 01642 473771). The winner will be announced on the 27th of January. □

ME AND MY PC

David Thorpe is the UK sales manager for Elite Information Systems, the US legal billing and accounts software company that over the last couple of years has been scooping up orders from many of the UK's largest law firms. Elite systems we know about but what does David Thorpe himself use?

When did you first get involved with computers? It was in 1980. At the time these were VRCs (visible record computers) and my involvement was purely in a professional capacity – I was selling them. I first started using PCs in earnest myself around five years ago.

What are your main PC hardware systems? My sales demonstration equipment comprises two laptops. Both Toshiba Pentiums (a P75 for a server and P100 for a client) each with 40Mb RAM and an 800Mb hard disk. The server runs Unix, the client Windows 95 – Elite has a client/server architecture.

My desktop system (in my home office) is a Viglen P133 with 32Mb of RAM, 3.6Gb hard disk, SCSI 8Gb tape drive, six speed CD-Rom, TV card (so I can watch golf whilst working!) and 17" monitor. The operating system is Windows 95.

What are the main applications you run? Other than the Elite demo software, the applications I most use are: the Lotus WordPro 96 wordprocessor, Eudora Internet email, CompuServe, the Netscape Navigator browser, Microsoft Excel and Dr Solomon's Anti Virus.

Which is your favourite program? I am a complete addict to Lotus WordPro. Although Elite is a "Word" shop, from what I can see WordPro is easier to use and more functional. I regularly have to put together documents of 200 plus pages, including graphics and tables, and to my mind WordPro is the current best product for this. I would also include email as a joint favourite. Travelling around as much as I do (here and abroad) it's incredibly useful to be able to keep in touch regardless of location. ➔

➔ **When is your PC turned on in the morning and switched off at night?** My desktop PC is never switched off.

What was your worst moment with a computer? Watching my desktop system "trash itself" after downloading a "Trojan" virus from the Internet. Although I virus check as a matter of course, many Trojans cannot be detected this way. It took me four days to rebuild the system from scratch – yes, being the true IT professional at that time I had no backups. It was this that motivated me to buy the SCSI tape unit and I now backup every day.

Do you surf the Net and what is your favourite site? Regularly. At the moment I think the Web has more to offer people in the IT world than the public at large. It's incredibly useful to find the latest hardware and software drivers, bug fixes and so on. I think over the next few years, assuming the bandwidth and security issues are resolved, it will become even more relevant. I already book airline flights directly over the Web (via British Midland) and foresee greater use of online shopping in future.

My favourite Web site has to be Elite's at <http://www.elite.bsis.com> In addition to providing product info we allow customers to log and enquire on problem reports, involve themselves in customer forums and exchange useful files between one another.

How many times a day do you check your email? Twenty-four! My desktop machine is configured to log on to check for both Internet and CompuServe email on the hour, every hour. This may seem excessive but email is becoming increasingly common for both internal purposes and communicating with customers. I probably receive an average of 20 emails each day.

What do you never leave home without? My Psion Series 3c organiser on which I keep my diary (after I gave up with Lotus Organiser). If I ever lost this I would really be in a mess. For that reason it is backed up to my PC every day. ➔

➔ **Have you any advice you would like to pass on to lawyers working with computers?** Take the time to really learn the applications you use. The investment up front will pay dividends later. All packages have shortcuts and these can aid proficiency enormously. And make sure your PCs – at home and in the office – are regularly virus checked and backed up!

Would you describe IT as a benefit or a liability? Most definitely a benefit. It enables tasks to be undertaken that were hitherto the province of a small number of "experts". But, it is not necessarily the great time saver people imagine. There is a terrific amount of "associated" time involved in the use of IT. □

Electronic publishing

☞ At the recent Online Information show in London, Dataware Technologies (☎ 01895 827200) previewed two new systems: *Credit Decisions* is a CD-Rom jointly developed with Infocheck-Equifax that provides credit details on over 1.6 million UK businesses. And *NetAnswers* is an intranet "solution" that uses the BRS Search full text retrieval system to access and share international patent information.

☞ Butterworths, in association with Books on Screen, has launched a CD-Rom version of the *Encyclopaedia of Forms & Precedents*. The CD has over 10,000 forms etc on one disk - the equivalent of 50 volumes of the conventional series. For a free trial copy call Adam Thomas on ☎ 0171 400 2716.

THE CHIP AT TWENTY-FIVE

This month the microprocessor - or the piece of etched silicon that changed our lives - celebrates its 25th anniversary. But, where are we now, what happens next and is any of this of relevance to legal technology?

The credit for the first processor chip goes to Intel, who in late 1971 launched the 4004. This had a *mips* (millions of instructions per second) rating of about 0.06 and its integrated circuitry contained the equivalent of 2300 transistors. This sounds puny when compared with the Pentium Pro, which came out in 1995 with a 440 *mips* rating and 5.5 million transistors but the 4004 still had the processing power of the ENIAC computer of 25 years further back in time (1946) with 18,000 vacuum tubes!

As for the future, the sky is the limit. Indeed there is a concept known as *Moore's Law* which holds (and continues to hold) that the number of transistors that can be placed on a single chip will double every 18 months.

But what use is this power inside the average law firm? After all a secretary using wordprocessing software still takes about the same time to type a letter using a PC containing a "fifth generation" Pentium chip as she would have in 1981 using the original IBM PC with its "first generation" 8088 processor. Chips may be faster but there is a speed limit on the movement of the human hand!

Enter the new MMX multimedia standard, which will be incorporated on Pentium P55C processors in the first quarter of 1997 and the *Klamath* range of Pentium Pros by the late summer.

The relevance of MMX is that applications such as video conferencing and, probably more importantly, speech recognition should then finally become viable technologies on desktop PCs. And that really could herald the breakthrough in fee earner productivity that lawyers have long been waiting for. □

DIARY DATES

☉ **Probate Software Seminars** Legal IT supplier Solicitors Own Software is to run a series of free regional seminars to demonstrate how its Probate Manager system can reduce the time it takes to prepare estate accounts by 75%. The first is scheduled for mid January in Bournemouth. Call Gordon Alexander of SOS on ☎ 01225 448664 for details.

☉ **27 January - SCL Awards** The winner of the Society for Computers & Law annual IT Award will be announced at the English Law Society by guest speaker Cherie Booth QC. Call the SCL on ☎ 0117 023 7393 for details.

☉ **27 to 29 January - Legal Tech New York** The biggest legal IT conference and exhibition in the USA. At the New York Hilton, call Corporate Presentations on ☎ 001 212 877 5619 for seminar programme details.

☉ **10 & 11 February - ACUA Conference** The annual AIM user group conference at The Belfry will this year be focussing on "the future of law", speakers include the new Law Society secretary general Jane Betts. Call Roger Hancock on ☎ 01789 296096 for details.

☉ **25 & 26 February - Information Systems for Lawyers** The annual Lawyer conference and exhibition. Now in its 9th year, the location is the London Marriott Hotel and the twin themes this year are exploiting existing technologies and planning for the future. Admission £697 (+ VAT), call Centaur Conferences on ☎ 0171 287 5000 for details.

☉ **26 February - 1997 Law Office IT Awareness Day** The ILCA conference and exhibition at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. The event is sponsored by **LEGAL TECHNOLOGY INSIDER** and the theme is the digital communications revolution. Admission from £95, call ILCA on ☎ 0181 294 2887 for details. □

COMMUNIC@TIONS FUTURES

Web operators are welcome to create links to the **LTI** site at <http://www.cloudnine.co.uk/cloudnine/> **LTI** is a member of the HTML Writers Guild and supports the Electronic Frontier Foundation campaign for free speech on the Internet.

HERBERT SMITH RESOLVE DOMAIN NAME ISSUE

In the High Court in London last Monday (9th December) Mr Justice Lightman ruled that actions by a Mr Michael Lawrie and his associates in registering the Internet domain name harrods.com "clearly constituted infringement of Harrods' registered trade marks and passing off".

The court granted an injunction and ordered the defendants to take all available steps to hand over the domain name to Harrods Ltd, the proprietors of the well-known Knightsbridge store.

Herbert Smith partner Nick Gardner, who handled the case as a solicitor advocate, said: "This judgment shows that, contrary to popular belief, existing legal principles can be applied to the Internet. The speculative registration of well known names, sometimes described as *domain name hijacking* or *cybersquatting* carries with it the clear possibility of legal action from those whose names or trademarks are used." □

EVE TO OFFER SAFE EMAIL ?

City of London law firm Elborne Mitchell has extended its internal GroupWise email system to the outside world via the Internet. The systems integration work was handled by NetConnect Ltd, who also organised the firm's domain name registration and connection to UUnet Pipex as its Internet service provider.

According to Elborne Mitchell IT manager Julie Murray "one of the key attractions of NetConnect's solution ➔

➔ was the inclusion of the EVE virus scanner." Designed and developed by NetConnect, EVE automatically scans all email messages and file attachments being transmitted and received by Elborne Mitchell for viruses.

Incoming *clean* messages are routed directly to the relevant recipient's mailbox address whereas suspect items are automatically quarantined. The system can also be configured to copy messages into a central mailbox for legal and/or audit reasons. □

LAND REGISTRY TO HAVE ON-LINE ACCESS

The Land Registry has begun work on a three year project to increase the scope for solicitors and other relevant parties to have on-line access to computerised records of land titles. As part of the Direct Access Service (DAS), the Registry plans to complete the computerisation of all property records by 1998 and to offer a wider range of facilities, including remote Internet access. □

AVAILABLE NOW...

Over the last few days a number of new Internet products have been launched. These include: the final release version of Microsoft Internet Explorer for Windows 3.1 although Windows 95 users might like to note the *beta* version of Internet Explorer 4.0 should also be available for downloading from <http://www.microsoft.com/ie> before the end of the year.

Also making its debut in the UK is the first of the new generation of ultra high speed modems. The Sportster Voice from US Robotics (☎ 0800 225252) is a 33.6 kbps modem that retails for £199 (inc VAT) and comes complete with Internet trial access software.

From January users will be able to upgrade to the x2 standard so they can download from the Internet at 56 kbps speeds. The upgrade price has still to be announced. □

Most reliable mobile phones

In a new survey, the Consumer Association's *Which?* magazine reports that the Vodafone and Cellnet analogue systems are the most reliable mobile phone networks in the UK with a failure rate of less than 1 in 36 calls. According to *Which?* the Orange digital service provides the poorest service with a failure rate in excess of 1 in 10 calls - although Orange dispute this figure.

Psion launch 4-in-1 PC card

Modem maker Psion Dacom (☎ 01908 261686) has launched a new multi function PCMCIA/PC card. Called the Gold Card Network, it combines a V34 modem with high speed fax, GSM mobile data and Ethernet communications capabilities in one credit card sized unit. Prices start at £399.

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And the next edition...
LTI is taking a short break for Christmas - so seasons greetings to all our readers - and we will be back with issue No 30 on 13th January.

Alexis Byter's COMPUTER LORE

So that's why we're so poor

A few weeks ago we carried a story about Gateshead solicitor Martin Halliday, who had just launched the CrimeTime legal aid costings system for criminal lawyers.

As part of his marketing activities, Martin is sending out demo disks to interested practitioners - and in so doing he is learning at firsthand the joys of selling to other lawyers.

His worst experience to-date was with a firm with a substantial criminal practice and a legal aid franchise who claimed that his system "was producing the wrong figures".

After much head scratching and program analysis, he finally located the source of the problem: the firm in question had overlooked the minor matter of altering its billing procedures to take into account the last lot of changes to legal aid payment rates.

"Ah," said the voice at the end of the phone, "perhaps that is why the Legal Aid Board query so many of our bills."

Now that's information

It is a frequent complaint that one of the problems with the Information Superhighway is that it contains so much drivel and for that reason I am indebted to the latest edition of the American

▶ newsletter *The Internet Lawyer* for news about the following decidedly useful "legal resource"...

Called *Medi-Net*, it contains background information on every physician licensed to practice medicine in the USA and enables you to screen them for evidence of disciplinary actions and verify their educational backgrounds and speciality certifications. You can find the site at <http://www.askmedi.com> but be warned there is a \$15 a throw search fee.

The first and the best

Congratulations to London media law firm Olswang for being the first people - by about a week - to send me a Christmas card.

The award for most novel "card" goes to IT/Internet consultant Delia Venables who sent me one electronically in "rich email" format. This is an email attachment that can be opened with a Web browser to reveal a full colour missive, complete with smiling Santa and hypertext links to other Web sites. Now all I have to do is find a way of resting a PC and a modem on the mantelpiece so everyone else can see it!

And, many thanks to Axxia Systems for sending me the smartest looking diary I have received in a long time although I am sorry to point out it is not Millennium proof as the pages run out on the 1st February 1988. □

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