

2 The Mona Lisa Robbery

At seven o'clock on the morning of Monday, August 21, 1911, three cleaners in the Louvre museum, in Paris, were walking through one of the rooms – the Salon Carré. The three men stopped to look at one of the world's most famous paintings – the Mona Lisa.

'This is the most valuable picture in the world,' said one of the men. 'They say it's worth one and a half million francs.'

After staring at the famous smile for a moment or two, the three men then walked on to the Grand Gallery, which was the next room, to continue with some repair work. It was 8.35 a.m. before they passed through the Salon Carré again, and one of the men noticed that the Mona Lisa had now gone.

'They've taken it away,' he laughed. 'They're afraid we'll steal it!'

The other men laughed with him, and went back to their work. It was not unusual for someone to move a painting in the gallery. They were often taken away to be photographed, and then put back later, so the three cleaners did not think any more about it.

At 7.20 the next morning, Poupardin, one of the Louvre guards, passed through the Salon Carré and noticed that the Mona Lisa was not in its place. He, too, thought someone had taken it away to be photographed.

At 9 a.m. a man called Louis Beroud arrived at the museum. He was a painter, and was painting a picture of the Salon Carré.

'Where is the Mona Lisa?' he asked Poupardin.

'It's being photographed,' replied the guard.

Beroud was annoyed. He wanted to continue his work, but he decided to wait for the return of the famous painting.

■ The Mona Lisa was painted by the Italian painter and scientist Leonardo da Vinci, who was born in 1452 and died in 1519. He spent the first part of his life in Florence, before working in Milan, Rome, and then France. The woman in the picture, with her famous smile, is the wife of Francesco di Bartolommeo del Gioconda di Zansi. The painting is sometimes called 'La Gioconda'.

