# Heartless theft of WWI memorial plaques leaves Kent church community devastated



Tears flowed from parishioners after the heartless theft of twin metal plaques, proudly honouring 150 fallen First World War servicemen, from Christ Church Luton in Chatham, Kent. The appalling act was discovered by Jonathan Pout, the church’s chief gardener, on Saturday, May 24, and has left the community reeling. The church’s reverend, Andrea Leonard, who has served in her role since 2015, expressed shock at the desecration, noting that the memorials had been a part of the church’s identity and local heritage for nearly a century. "There were definitely tears... People say 'oh my great uncle was on that list,' and people recognise the names on there," she said, highlighting the emotional connections many locals have to the memorial.

Rev. Leonard drew a stark contrast between the theft of a physical object and the emotional toll of losing a piece of history. "If the church had been broken into and a computer stolen, I'd have said 'oh, we can get another one'," she lamented. "But this is desecration. It's horrible... the lack of respect for people who gave everything for us to be free is just shocking." This sentiment underscores an increasingly concerning trend: across the UK, numerous memorials have been targeted for their metal components instead of mere vandalism, pointing to a distressing pattern of theft linked to the rising prices of scrap metal.

Indeed, this incident is not isolated. In recent months, other memorials have been similarly desecrated, revealing a troubling tendency among thieves. A 4ft tall brass lectern from All Saints' Church in Cambridgeshire was stolen in a targeted act, with nothing else removed from the site. Police investigations have yet to yield suspects, reflecting the challenges law enforcement faces in resolving such crimes. Furthermore, plaques from Ilfracombe War Memorial were recovered only after a public tip-off led to the arrest of two individuals charged with dealing in stolen goods. Other recent thefts include five D-Day memorial plaques stolen in Bristol and two bronze plaques from a war memorial in Manchester, indicating a widespread issue.

Amidst this sorrow, Rev. Leonard and the congregation displayed remarkable resilience. In light of the theft, they have offered a £500 reward for information leading to the return of the stolen plaques. Should recovery prove impossible, the church plans to commission replicas made from less valuable materials, ensuring that the memory of these servicemen endures. "Because we're a military area, we’ve already had veterans' associations saying they would help us with fundraising to make replacements that are not worth stealing, made of something different." This proactive approach illustrates the community’s commitment to preserving their local heritage despite the unfortunate circumstances.

As the investigation continues, Rev. Leonard remains optimistic. "We’ve got enough photographs... to have all the names, so that’s not going to be an issue, I don't think." Yet, the reverend suspects that the stolen plaques might ultimately be lost to the scrap metal trade, a grim fate that highlights the increasing vulnerability of such memorials. The theft not only underscores the need for enhanced security measures in protecting historical artefacts but also serves as a wake-up call to communities nationwide about the sanctity of these memorials which commemorate those who served bravely in conflict.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060691/horrible-thieves-steal-wwi-memorials), [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2023-06-28/first-world-war-memorial-stolen-from-church)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060691/horrible-thieves-steal-wwi-memorials), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-devon-67955660), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-49555934)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-10682277), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-15671386)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060691/horrible-thieves-steal-wwi-memorials), [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-derbyshire-10924151)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060691/horrible-thieves-steal-wwi-memorials> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2023-06-28/first-world-war-memorial-stolen-from-church> - A 4ft tall brass lectern, shaped like an eagle and weighing 100kg, was stolen from All Saints' Church in Pidley, Cambridgeshire. The theft is believed to have been targeted, as nothing else was taken from the church. Cambridgeshire Police are investigating but have not identified any suspects. ([itv.com](https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2023-06-28/first-world-war-memorial-stolen-from-church?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-devon-67955660> - Two men, aged 39 and 43, have been charged with handling stolen goods and dealing in tainted cultural objects after six brass plaques were stolen from Ilfracombe War Memorial in Devon. The plaques, which honour fallen military personnel from World Wars I and II, were recovered in Bideford following a public tip-off. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-devon-67955660?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-49555934> - Five D-Day memorial plaques were stolen from Castle Park in Bristol. The oak and brass plaques, commemorating the 1944 Normandy landings, were installed on the 75th anniversary of D-Day. The theft has been described as 'mindless and disrespectful,' and Avon and Somerset Police are investigating. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-49555934?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-10682277> - Two bronze plaques from a World War I memorial in Blackley, Manchester, were stolen after thieves chipped away at the stone monument. The plaques, erected in 1921, list the names of 215 soldiers who died between 1914 and 1918. The theft is believed to be for scrap value, estimated at £150. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-10682277?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-15671386> - Fourteen metal plaques bearing the names of 243 World War I servicemen were stolen from Carshalton war memorial in Sutton, London. Temporary plastic tablets have been installed to replace the stolen plaques, with new stone tablets commissioned to be completed by mid-December. A £3,000 reward has been offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-15671386?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-derbyshire-10924151> - Two men, aged 30 and 37, have been charged with theft after bronze plaques from Derby's Midland Railway War Memorial were stolen and later found in undergrowth. The plaques, engraved with the names of hundreds of railway workers who lost their lives in World War I, were reported missing on 4 August. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-derbyshire-10924151?utm_source=openai))