# Gold toilet theft mastermind’s network probed amid international smuggling fears



Investigations into the audacious theft of an 18-carat gold toilet from Blenheim Palace have revealed that the stolen item, valued at approximately £4.75 million, may have been smuggled out of the UK. On 14 September 2019, the gilded lavatory was taken during a late-night burglary while it was on display at the historic palace as part of an exhibition by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan. The theft, which caused significant flooding and damage to the palace, has drawn considerable attention, not just for the bizarre nature of the crime, but also for the profile of the individuals involved.

James Sheen, a 39-year-old known as a "career criminal", is believed to have been the mastermind behind the operation. Following the theft, he reportedly had the 98 kg toilet dismantled for resale to contacts within the criminal underworld. Thames Valley Police have confirmed that they are collaborating with international partners in an effort to trace the whereabouts of the gold. Detective Superintendent Bruce Riddell stated that while the gold could potentially have been moved abroad, it is more likely that it underwent a transformation within the UK first. This transformation could prevent immediate recognition as stolen property, complicating recovery efforts.

To further the investigation, police are focusing on the identification and seizure of criminal assets linked to the thieves. Riddell noted that the detectives are pursuing leads regarding “a significant amount” in assets connected to Sheen and his associates. “He’s not frightened of who he hurts or what he damages,” Riddell commented, highlighting the mentality of those involved. Sheen is currently serving a lengthy sentence for other crimes, which include multiple thefts such as cash-point robberies and a museum burglary. Alongside him, Michael Jones has been convicted of burglary, while Frederick Doe received a suspended sentence for conspiracy to transfer criminal property.

The investigation has proven to be intricate, with hundreds of hours of CCTV footage reviewed and thousands of statements collected. Police have detained twelve individuals in connection with the theft. Notably, incriminating evidence, including images and voice notes on Sheen’s phone, has surfaced, allegedly depicting profits from the heist as well as traces of gold found on clothing linked to him.

As investigators dig deeper, Riddell expressed his confidence that more individuals may be implicated but admitted that substantiating charges against them remains an obstacle due to insufficient evidence at this stage. Additionally, he indicated that there could be numerous people involved in the handling of the gold who might not fully recognise their participation in illicit activities.

Authorities are poised to apply a serious crime prevention order upon Sheen's release from his current sentence, which could lead to further restrictions should he breach its terms. The ongoing inquiry into this unusual theft continues to evolve, as police pursue every avenue to recover the lost artwork and bring those responsible to justice.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/gold-from-toilet-stolen-from-blenheim-palace-may-have-been-smuggled-abroad-JHSQ6HPYARP6DIDPGVSW4Q3REE/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/gold-from-toilet-stolen-from-blenheim-palace-may-have-been-smuggled-abroad-JHSQ6HPYARP6DIDPGVSW4Q3REE/> - Thames Valley Police are investigating the possibility that the 18-carat gold toilet stolen from Blenheim Palace in 2019 was smuggled out of the UK. James Sheen is believed to have dismantled the £4.75 million toilet and attempted to sell its parts to underworld contacts. The police are collaborating with international partners to trace the gold's movement, though they acknowledge the challenges in tracking such assets across borders. Financial investigations are ongoing to recover assets linked to the crime.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-68713760> - James 'Jimmy' Sheen, 39, from Wellingborough, pleaded guilty to the theft of an 18-carat gold toilet from Blenheim Palace. The £4.8 million toilet was stolen in 2019 while on display as part of an art exhibition. Sheen is already serving a 17-year sentence for other thefts, including from cash points. The theft caused flooding and damage to the 18th-century palace in Woodstock. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-68713760?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/news/thames-valley/news/2025/march/17-03-25/three-men-convicted-in-connection-with-blenheim-palace-golden-toilet-burglary/> - Three men have been convicted in relation to the burglary of a golden toilet from Blenheim Palace. James Sheen, 40, pleaded guilty to burglary, conspiracy to transfer criminal property, and transferring criminal property. Michael Jones, 39, was found guilty of burglary, and Fred Doe, 36, was found guilty of conspiracy to transfer criminal property. The theft occurred in the early hours of 14 September 2019, with the toilet valued at £4.8 million. ([thamesvalley.police.uk](https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/news/thames-valley/news/2025/march/17-03-25/three-men-convicted-in-connection-with-blenheim-palace-golden-toilet-burglary/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-68032939> - Three men have pleaded not guilty to charges related to the theft of an 18-carat gold toilet from Blenheim Palace. The £4.8 million toilet was taken from the stately home in Oxfordshire in 2019 while it was being showcased as part of an exhibition by Italian conceptual artist Maurizio Cattelan. The men, accused of burglary and conspiracy to transfer criminal property, denied all charges during a hearing at Oxford Crown Court. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-68032939?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/thames-and-chiltern/news/three-guilty-blenheim-palace-gold-toilet-theft-case> - Three men involved in the theft and sale of a multi-million pound gold toilet from Blenheim Palace have been convicted. The 18-carat gold toilet – a work of art insured for $6 million (£4.75 million) and weighing approximately 98 kg – was stolen under the cover of darkness just two days after it went on display at the Oxfordshire stately home. James Sheen, 40, and his accomplices drove two stolen vehicles through locked gates at Blenheim Palace shortly before 5 am on 14 September 2019. ([cps.gov.uk](https://www.cps.gov.uk/thames-and-chiltern/news/three-guilty-blenheim-palace-gold-toilet-theft-case?utm_source=openai))