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£75K Vandalism Damage at Bowers Gifford Church as Essex Tops UK in Church Crime Rates

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— Categories: Crime



Repairs have now begun at a historic church in Bowers Gifford after a destructive vandalism spree caused more than £75,000 in damage, amid growing concern over a spike in crimes against places of worship in Essex.

St Margaret's Church, located on Church Road, suffered two devastating incidents of vandalism in November last year. The 14th-century building, a central part of the village's

heritage, sustained significant damage, including broken stained glass windows, harm to its roof and organ, and desecrated gravestones. The church was forced to close for nearly four months, only reopening on Easter Sunday.

Church warden Nikki Dilorenzo said the long-awaited repairs to the windows began this week. “It’s taken some time to get the stained glass windows repaired, but that work started this week and should be completed today,” she said. “We lost out on three funerals because of the damage, which was incredibly upsetting for the families who had chosen the church specifically. Because it’s a small village, even those who aren’t part of the congregation have been really upset by the scale of the damage.”

The community has rallied behind St Margaret’s, with more than £15,000 raised through donations. The funds are being used not just for repairs but also for added security. “It’s a church for heaven’s sake,” Nikki added. “If they’d had gone down to steal brass or lead, you could also understand, but this was just mindless vandalism.”

Despite reopening, the church continues to deal with the aftermath. The organ remains out of action, and further restoration work is ongoing. Meanwhile, plans are underway to install closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras as a deterrent against future attacks.

Rural Concern

Essex is now among the worst areas in the United Kingdom for crimes targeting churches, with over 500 incidents recorded between 2022 and 2024. These figures, released by the Countryside Alliance, a rural campaigning organisation, show a worrying trend of attacks on sacred and historical buildings across the country.

Mo Metcalf-Fisher, director of external affairs at the Countryside Alliance, stressed the importance of protecting religious buildings, especially in isolated locations. “We are so fortunate to have many beautiful churches across Essex, but many are isolated,” he said. “Churches are the beating heart of many rural towns and villages. They are meant to be places of sanctity, solace, and refuge. Increasingly, however, they seem to be being subjected to awful acts of crime on a regular basis. We cannot allow these cherished places to continue to be unprotected against criminals, and it is vital that the public keep a watchful eye and report any issues to the police.”

Essex Police responded swiftly when the vandalism was reported, arriving at the scene within 15 minutes. A police dog unit was deployed, and two teenage boys, aged 15 and 16, were arrested on suspicion of criminal damage and burglary. They remain on police bail as investigations continue.

A spokesperson for Essex Police commented: “We roundly condemn any form of crime targeting places of worship, historic buildings or cultural sites in our county. We are committed to tackling this issue and will continue to work with partners to reduce offending and raise awareness about the long-lasting damage heritage crime can have.”

Nikki thanked the local community for their unwavering support, stating that “the disgust at what happened has been widespread.”

Residents who spot suspicious activity near churches in Essex are encouraged to report it to Essex Police via 101 or anonymously through the CrimeStoppers website.