

# Press release: Stolen Spencer masterpiece returned to owners

Cookham from Englefield by Sir Stanley Spencer was on loan to the Stanley Spencer Gallery in Cookham in 2012 when thieves broke in through a window and removed it.

The owners said they were devastated at the loss of the painting, which was of great sentimental value.

However they were compensated for the loss of the painting by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport under the Government Indemnity Scheme. The scheme provides UK museums and galleries with an alternative to commercial insurance, which can be costly. It allows organisations to display art and objects that they might not have been able to borrow due to high insurance costs.

Five years after the theft of Cookham from Englefield, police discovered the painting hidden under a bed during a drugs raid on a property in West London.

A 28-year-old man was sentenced at Kingston Crown Court in October after he pleaded guilty to conspiracy to supply class A drugs and acquiring criminal property. He also admitted a charge of handling stolen goods. Last month the owners were finally reunited with their painting

Arts Minister Michael Ellis said:

Spencer is one of our most renowned painters and a true great of the 20th century. It is wonderful that this story has had a happy ending and the painting has been returned to its rightful owners.

This has been made possible because of the Government Indemnity Scheme. It exists to protect owners when lending their works to public galleries. Without it there would be fewer world class pieces on display across the country for people to enjoy.

Detective Inspector Brian Hobbs, of the Met's Organised Crime Command, said:

I am pleased to say that the painting has now been returned to its owners. The seizure of the painting was the result of proactive investigation by the Organised Crime Command, which resulted in a significant custodial sentence for the defendant found in possession of the painting.

Detective Constable Sophie Hayes, of the Met's Art and Antiques Unit, said:

The Art and Antiques Unit was delighted to assist with the recovery and return of this important painting. The circumstances of its recovery underline the links between cultural heritage crime and wider criminality. The fact that the painting was stolen five years before it was recovered did not hinder a prosecution for handling stolen goods, demonstrating the Met will pursue these matters wherever possible, no matter how much time has elapsed.

Sir Stanley Spencer (1891 – 1959) was an English painter known for his works depicting Biblical scenes of his birth place Cookham. He is one of the most important artists of the 20th century and during the Second World War was commissioned by the War Artists' Advisory Committee.

It is estimated that the Government Indemnity Scheme saves UK museums and galleries £14 million a year. In the last ten years of the scheme, only 12 claims for damage and loss have been received. This incident is the first one where an item covered by the Scheme has been stolen and successfully returned to its original owners. In line with the rules of the Government Indemnity Scheme for return of the painting, the owners repaid the amount they had received in settlement of the claim minus the cost of repairs and depreciation.

Notes to editors:

- The Government Indemnity Scheme is administered by Arts Council England on behalf of DCMS.
- In the event of loss or damage to an object or work covered by the scheme, the government compensates the owners.