

£100,000 reward for return of historic font.

A BRENTWOOD-BASED company is offering a £100,000 reward for the safe return of an ancient font and other religious artefacts plundered in a church. Fox 121 Security Ltd, specialists in security and surveillance, has stepped in to help the tiny church of St Peter's in Little Warley retrieve its precious icons.

Joint churchwarden David Tee described the gesture as a fantastic. The rare font, a relic from the time of Oliver Cromwell, could be worth in excess of £100,000 to a specialist overseas collector. It was stolen between Friday, February 1 and lunchtime on Saturday, February 2.

Burglars smashed a leaded light window and damaged bricks to remove the original 16th century lock to the Norman door. They also made off with £2,000 of church ware including two brass 1901 candlesticks, a matching brass cross, a portable brass lectern and a full size wooden lectern complete with reading light.

Church leaders fear the font was stolen to order and could end up abroad.

Cleo Murphy, one of the directors of Fox 121 Security Ltd, said the company had been moved by the plight of the church. He said "It's only a small church. It must be devastating. We have decided to do what we can to help them retrieve the artefacts stolen.

Safe return

"We are offering a reward of £100,000 for the safe return of the font and other artefacts in the condition in which they were stolen." Churchwarden Mr Tee, who lives close to St Peter's in The Old Rectory, and is also a lay reader, said: "This is a fantastic offer. We are a small community and this theft is a big blow."

"The font was placed in the church in 1650 and is authentic Cromwellian. We want it back. We have had some very kind letters of condolence from several people."

The Rev Peter Alcock, who is in charge of St Peter's, said the church had been able to borrow an old cross, candle and lectern from its sister church, West Horndon Church. Anyone with information should call Brentwood Police on 01277 262212.