

- Following the First World War art took different directions. One group, the **Dadaists, we shall look at next time**. They completely rejected everything that had gone before as they saw it as part of a social order that led to the death of millions of people.
- The other group were associated with the phrase '**return to order**' and they saw the war as an appalling episode to be forgotten and wanted to return to the figurative art that predominated before the war. One outstanding figurative artists was Stanley Spencer although he was never going to be anything other than a figurative artist.
- Sir Stanley Spencer CBE RA (30 June 1891 – 14 December 1959, died aged 68) was an English painter. Shortly after leaving the Slade School of Art, Spencer became well known for his paintings depicting Biblical scenes occurring as if in Cookham, the small village beside the River Thames where he was born and spent much of his life.

Notes

Phases of his career and major works:

1. Spencer's Early Life, 1891 to 1914
 1. *Head of a Slade Girl*, 1909

2. *Two Girls and a Beehive*, 1910, private collection
3. *John Donne Arriving in Heaven*, 1911, Fitzwilliam Museum
4. *Self-Portrait*, 1914
5. *Apple Gatherers*, 1912-13, Tate
6. *The Centurion's Servant*, 1914, Tate
1. World War One, 1914 to 1918
 1. *Travoy's Arriving with Wounded*, 1919
 2. *Swan Upping at Cookham*, 1915-19, Tate
2. 1920 to 1927, *The Resurrection*, Cookham
 1. *The Resurrection*, Cookham, 1923 -27, Tate
3. The Sandham Memorial Chapel. Burghclere, 1926-32 (National Trust)
 1. *Bed-making*
4. Cookham, 1932-1935, The Church House Project
 1. *The Dustmen or The Lovers*, 1934, Laing Art Gallery
 2. *St Francis and the Birds*, 1935, private collection
5. Divorce and Remarriage, 1935-1938
 1. *Portrait of Patricia Preece*, 1934, private collection
 2. *Self Portrait with Patricia Preece*, 1937, Fitzwilliam Museum
 3. *Hilda, Unity and Dolls*, 1937, Leeds Art Gallery
 4. *The Beatitudes of Love* series, 1938
6. Port Glasgow, World War Two, 1935-1945
 1. *Christ in the Wilderness* series, 1939-43. private collection
 2. *Shipbuilding on the Clyde* series, 1940-45, Imperial War Museum
7. Resurrection Pictures, 1945-1950
 1. *Resurrection*, Port Glasgow. 1945 (Tate Gallery)
 2. *The Temptation of St Anthony*, 1945, 121.9 x 91.4 cm, private collection
8. Final Years, 1951 to 1959
 1. *Portrait of Sibyl Williams*, 1955, private collection
 2. *Mr and Mrs Baggett*, 1956, Stanley Spencer Gallery
 3. *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta*, 1954-59, Stanley Spencer Gallery
 4. *Magnolias*, 1938, private collection
 5. *Wisteria at Englefield*, 1954, private collection
 6. *Lilac and Clematis at Englefield*, 1954, Stanley Spencer Gallery
 7. *Self-portrait*, 1959, Tate

- The title of this talk refers to the exhibition *Stanley Spencer: An English Vision*, at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C in 1997. It subsequently went to Mexico City and California.
- Note that 'figurative' of an artist or work of art means representing forms that are recognizably derived from life, that is they are representational, not abstract. It does not mean an artist that only paints figures although the term is often used for artists that often painted the human figure. Today critics often argue that abstract

and figurative paintings both do the work of representation in some form and they are therefore more closely related than previously thought.


References

Keith Bell, *Stanley Spencer* (Phaidon, 1992)

Royal Academy catalogue *Stanley Spencer, RA* (1980)

The first of three volumes of Spencer's (abridged) journals is being published on 3 November 2016 as Stanley Spencer (Author), John Spencer (Editor), *Looking to Heaven: Vol. 1*

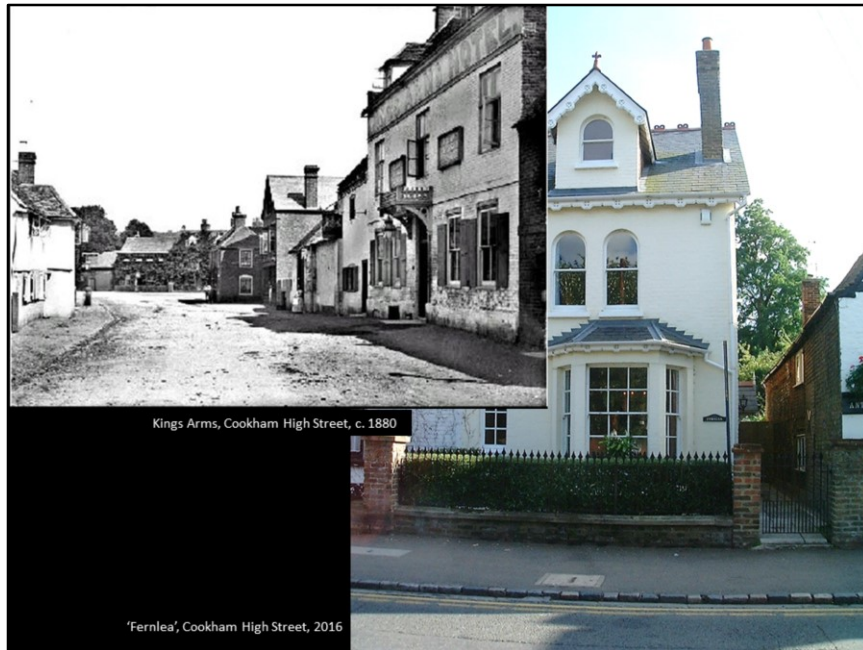
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_Spencer
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- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/sir-stanley-spencer-1977>
- <http://www.stanleypencer.org.uk>



NEW WAYS OF SEEING: MODERN BRITISH ART

1. New Ways of Seeing
2. Impressionism, Post-Impressionism & Fauvism
3. Cubism, Abstraction and the British Avant Garde
4. Vorticism and World War One Artists
5. **Return to Order: Stanley Spencer**
6. Dada, Surrealism & Expressionism
7. British Sculpture & Henry Moore
8. World War Two Artists
9. British Figurative Art
10. Summary 1900-1950

- Today is dedicated to Stanley Spencer, one of the great British figurative artists. **One of Spencer's greatest admirers is David Hockney who has actively campaigned to raise the status of figurative art.** Spencer was particularly skilled at organising multi-figure compositions and his nude work provoked great shock and controversy at the time.
- Spencer painted hundreds of works over his lifetime and I have selected one representative example of each type of period of his work. This does not give a rounded view of his oeuvre and I recommend a definitive book such as Keith Bell, *Stanley Spencer* (Phaidon, 1992).



'Fernlea', Cookham High Street, 2016

Kings Arms, Cookham High Street, c. 1880, four doors down from Fernlea

Phases of his life

1. Spencer's Early Life, 1891 to 1914

- **1891, A crow fell down the chimney at Fernlea** on Cookham High Street, flapped around the room, flew out of the window and **Stanley Spencer was born**. The date was June 30th 1891 - and the family thought it was a good omen. He was the eighth surviving child of Annie and William Spencer, a piano teacher, and he was joined a year later by his younger brother Gilbert. This is a picture of the **house today** and this is how the High Street looked in the 1880s. The Kings Arms Hotel is four houses away from Fernlea.
- 1891-1907, his father did not think the local school was satisfactory and could not afford a private school so Spencer was **educated by his sisters Annie and Florence** in the shed at the bottom of the garden next door but as Spencer did not like school work so they allowed him to draw instead. **Painting was not an important subject** for the Spencer family but there were a number of reproductions on the walls and when he was old enough

- his mother took him to the **Summer Exhibition** at the Royal Academy.
- **1907**, Spencer was stimulated by reading from the **family bible** and enjoyed taking **long, solitary walks**. He spent time drawing with the wife of a local landowner, **Lady Boston** who, in 1907, arranged for him to go to **Maidenhead Technical Institute**.
 - **1908-12** he studied at the **Slade under Henry Tonks**. Contemporaries included Christopher Nevinson, David Bomberg, and Paul Nash. **1912** he exhibited *John Donne Arriving in Heaven* at Roger Fry's **Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition**. He was considered to be influenced by **Gauguin**. However, he was more influenced by **Giotto and Mantegna** and when asked what he thought of Picasso he said 'I haven't got past Piero della Francesca yet'. Paul Nash called him 'the last of the Pre-Raphaelites'.

1. World War One, 1914 to 1918

- **1915-18** he attended the **Slade School of Art** between 1908 and 1912 and so his career started at the same time as the **First World War**. During the war his **poor physique** caused him to apply for ambulance duties. He enlisted in the **Royal Army Medical Corp** and was sent to Bristol and later Macedonia. He requested a transfer to the infantry in 1917.
- **1918**, he returned to **Cookham** in December 1918 to hear his brother Sydney had been killed in action three months previously and he lost '**the all pervading joy I felt as a child**' and the 'serenity of spirit'. His much loved brother had been killed in the last few weeks of the war and returning to the work after the war he found it difficult to continue, often stating "**It is not proper or sensible to expect to paint after such experience.**" Many artists felt the same and although in Europe some artists reacted against the slaughter by rejecting all social, cultural and artistic standards in Britain and among many artists in Europe there was what has been called a "**return to order**". The excesses of modernism were rejected and there was a return to more conventional figurative painting. **Cubism was partially abandoned** even by its creators, Braque and Picasso, and **Futurism**, which had praised machinery, violence and war, **was rejected by most of its adherents**. The return to order was associated with a revival of classicism and realistic painting.

2. 1920 to 1927, *The Resurrection*, Cookham

- **1919** lived and worked at Cookham. He became a member New English Art Club until 1927.
- **1920-21** he lodged with Henry Slessor and his wife at Bourne End near Cookham.
- **1922** he accompanied the **Carline family** on a holiday to Yugoslavia, became **engaged to Hilda Carline** and moved to Hampstead.
- **1925 married Anne Hilda Carline** and had two daughters Shirin (1925) and Unity (1930). When he first met Hilda he became a changed man in his own

words the old Stanley Spencer 'was now no longer so' and the new '**lust or what you will was sweeping me along**'.

- **1926 completed *The Resurrection***, one of his '**major, most memorable achievements**'. *The Times* critic would call it '**the most important picture painted by any English artist during the present century ...** What makes it so astonishing is the combination in it of careful detail with modern freedom in the treatment of form. It is as if a **Pre-Raphaelite had shaken hands with a Cubist.**'

1. The Sandham Memorial Chapel. Burghclere, 1926-32 (National Trust)

- **1927** Spencer received commissions including the **Sandham Memorial Chapel** (1927-1932). It was in 1927 that he held his first **one-man exhibition** at the Goupil Gallery. The centre piece of the exhibition was ***The Resurrection, Cookham***.

2. Cookham, 1932-1935, The Church House Project

- **1932** moved to 'Lindworth', a large house in Cookham. Began work on '**Church-House**' idea. Elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. Dudley Tooth became his sole agent.

3. Divorce and Remarriage, 1935-1938

- **1935 resigned from the Royal Academy** after the rejection of *The Dustman* and other works from the Summer Exhibition and the controversy resulted in his popularity declining.
- **1937 he was divorced** by his wife Hilda Carline and immediately married Patricia Preece. His second marriage was a disaster, never consummated and his wife manipulated and exploited him. Spencer tried to win back Hilda but never succeeded. He began work on the *Beatitudes of Love* series.
- **1938 in financial difficulties**, left Cookham and went to stay with the Rothensteins in London. Dudley Tooth took over managing his business affairs. Began *Christ in the Wilderness* series in bed-sit in Swiss Cottage.

4. Port Glasgow, World War Two, 1935-1945

- **1939-41** stayed at the White Hart Inn, Leonard Stanley, Gloucestershire, with George and Daphne Charlton. In March 1940 the War Artists Advisory Committee commissioned Spencer to paint the **Port Glasgow shipyards**, which occupied him until 1946. Went to live in Epsom with his children and then moved back to Cookham.

5. Resurrection Pictures, 1945-1950

- **1945 began *The Resurrection, Port Glasgow* series** (1945-1950). His reputation improved as a result of his war commissions
- **1950 Alfred Munnings**, the President of the Royal Academy, **initiated a prosecution** against Spencer for **obscenity** but Munnings then resigned and the new President persuaded Spencer to re-join the RA. **Hilda died** of breast cancer in November. This followed years of mental health problems

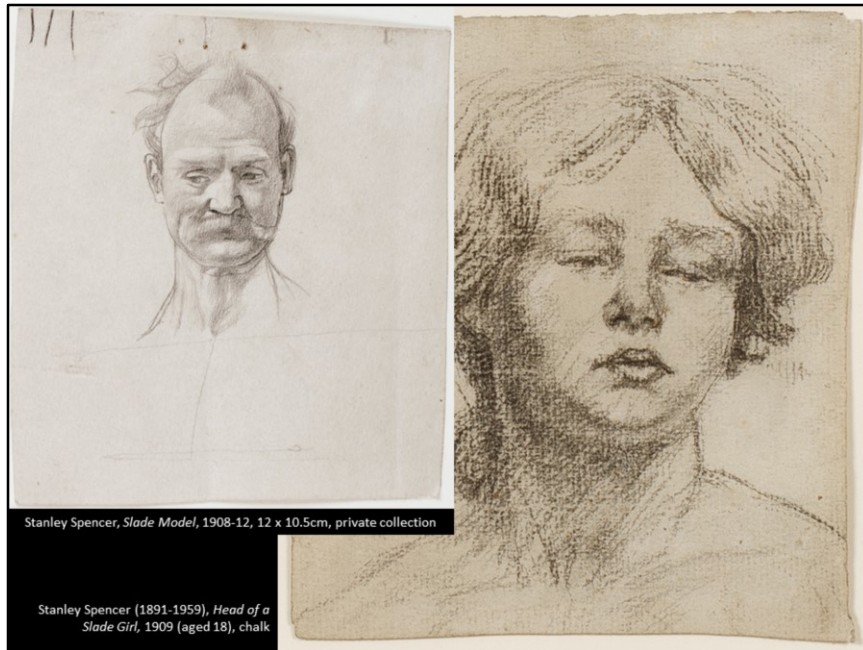
during which Spencer visited her weekly and sent long letters, some of over one hundred pages. He continued to send letters after her death.

6. Final Years, 1951 to 1959

- **1954** he **visited China** as a guest of the Chinese authorities.
- **1955** there was a **retrospective** exhibition at the Tate Gallery.
- **1959 knighted. Died** of bowel cancer on 14 December aged 58 at the Canadian War Memorial Hospital, Cliveden, Berkshire. His last years until his death in 1959 were financially successful although his reputation and his sale prices did not soar until after his death.

Notes

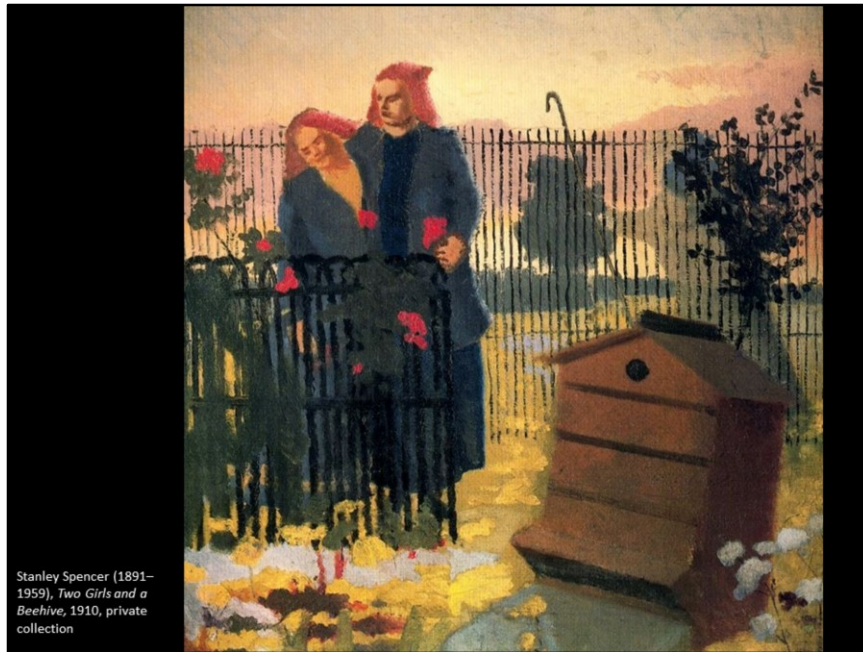
- Spencer wrote extensively about his work so we have a lot of written material to consider.
- Spencer was the eighth surviving child of William (known as 'Pa') and Anna (née Slack). The family home was called 'Fernlea' on Cookham High Street and had been built by Spencer's grandfather.
- Cookham was always a Garden of Eden for him and in the 1930s he transformed it into a 'Village in Heaven'.
- The Spencer family:
 - Parents: William and Anna
 - Brother: William G (G)
 - Sister: Annie
 - Brother: Harold
 - Sister: Florence
 - Brother: Percy
 - Brother: Horace
 - Brother: Stanley
 - Brother: Gilbert
- Grandfather Julius was a master builder and built at least two of the Spencer homes - the family house on the High Street, and later the home he shared for a while with his sister Annie at Cliveden View on the High Road in Cookham Rise.
- **They were an extraordinary family.** 'Pa' William was a music teacher, who himself had trained in London. As Spencer's biographer Ken Pople pointed out, the family produced 'a knight, two professors, a concert violinist, a professional stage conjurer, the Director of the National Building Institute in London, an Oxford graduate (killed in the Great War) and the wife of a Cambridge don'. He should have added 'two professional artists' as Gilbert also went on to be a successful artist.



Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), *Head of a Slade Girl*, 1909 (aged 18), chalk
 Inscribed verso: 'Drawn by Stanley Spencer/when at the art School of Slade/
 University (sic) in the year 1909' and in his sister Florence Image's hand 'above is in
 Stanley's or Sydney's/ handwriting – I believe Sydney's/ Florence Image, 1940'.
 Provenance: Florence Image (nee Spencer); her niece Pamela Spencer (1924-2012).
 Stanley Spencer, *Slade Model*, 1908-12, pencil, 12 x 10.5cm, private collection

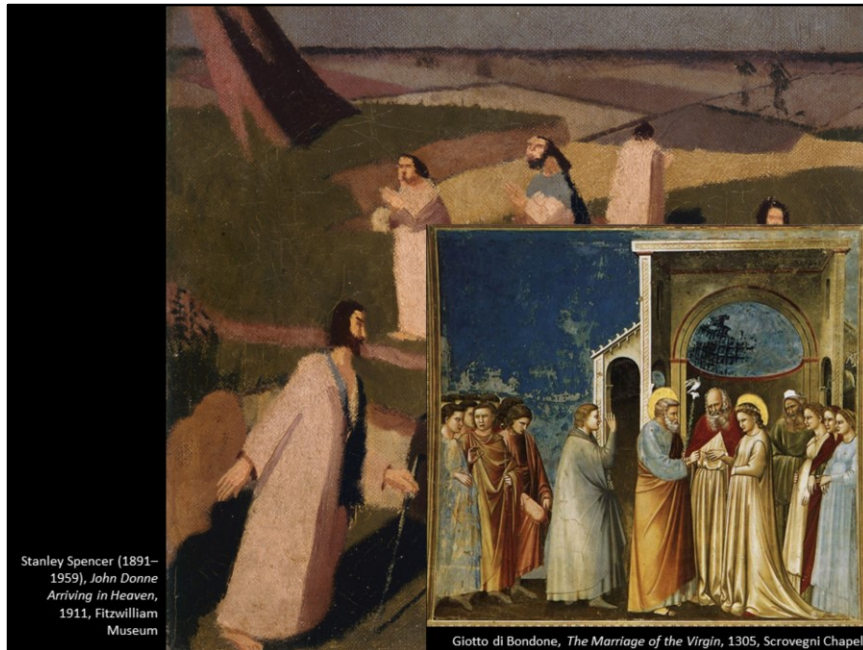
1. Spencer's Early Life, 1891 to 1914

- **From 1908 to 1912 he studied at the Slade School of Art under Henry Tonks with Dora Carrington, Mark Gertler, Paul Nash and David Bomberg.** However, he so loved Cookham that he would **come home for tea** on the train and so miss the rapid drawing life class. His frequent references to Cookham in his conversation gave rise to the nickname, 'Cookham', which Spencer himself used.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Two Girls and a Beehive*, 1910, private collection

- This is his **first serious attempt at painting** that has survived. He was 19 and he had been at the Slade School of Art for two years. In the 1940s he recalled that he had **visions about these girls** and he was on the lookout for them everywhere. The shadowy figure of Christ behind the beehive gives religious significance to the encounter and gives it a spiritual dimension. Spencer wrote about 'becoming aware of the rich religious significance of the place'.
- The girls are **Dorothy ('Dot') and Emily Wooster** (Worster), daughters of the **Cookham butcher** and friends of Spencer. It was painted at **Mill Lane, Cookham**, the village where he was born. The Spencer and Wooster families had frequent contact and Spencer went walking with them before he went to the Slade in London.
- The mysterious **Christ-like figure behind the fence** sanctifies the scene and introduces us to Spencer's lifelong interest in religious subjects. Spencer wrote that it indicates, '**My becoming conscious of the rich religious significance of the place I lived in.**' It has also been suggested that in this relationship between Spencer and the two sisters we see **his yearning for two women** that later turned into a **complex love triangle**.

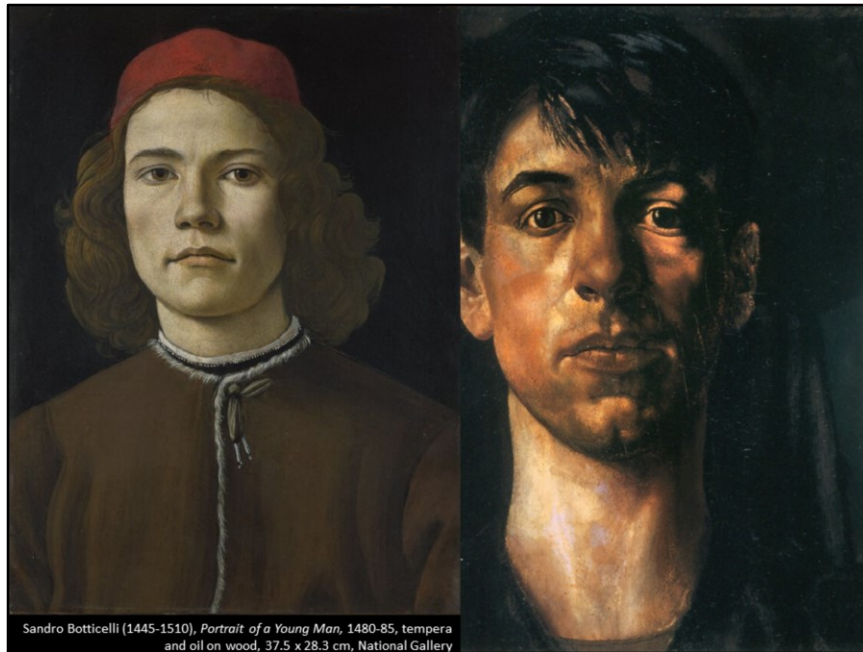


Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *John Donne Arriving in Heaven*, 1911, Fitzwilliam Museum

Giotto di Bondone, *The Marriage of the Virgin*, 1305, Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel, Padua, Italy

- Spencer was responsive to the active discussion of **early modernist painting** that he encountered at the Slade. By 1909 he was **attending Roger Fry's lectures**, reflected in the formalised design of *John Donne Arriving in Heaven* (1911). He probably saw Fry's first **Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1910** and this painting was created in 1911 when Spencer was a 20-year-old student. It was **exhibited in 1912** with some drawings in the British section of the **Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition** organised by Roger Fry in London.
- He was part of a Slade group known as the **Neo-Primitives** which included Mark Gertler, William Roberts and C.R.W. Nevinson. Spencer was considered to be influenced by Gauguin. However, he was more influenced by **Giotto and Mantegna** and when asked **what he thought of Picasso** he said '**I haven't got past Piero della Francesca yet**'. Paul Nash called him '**the last of the Pre-Raphaelites**'.
- Inspired by his reading of John Donne's (1572-1631) *Sermons*. Spencer wrote that four people '**pray in all directions because everywhere is Heaven so to speak**'.

- The flat planes of colour, the limited colour range and the flattened simplified forms caused **Henry Tonks to accuse him** of being influenced by the Post-Impressionist exhibition. Spencer **took this badly** as it implied his **vision was contaminated** and he called **Tonks a 'damned liar'**. However, Tonks had a good point.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Self-portrait*, 1914, 63 x 51 cm, Tate

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510), *Portrait of a Young Man*, 1480-85, tempera and oil on wood, 37.5 x 28.3 cm, National Gallery

- Spencer's compelling 1914 self-portrait established him as the most **wide-ranging talent of his generation**.
- This was his first self-portrait in oils and was painted in his Berkshire bedroom when he was 23 just weeks before WWI started. He was attempting to emulate the Old Masters, in particular the **pre-Raphaelites Botticelli** (114-1510) and Bernadino Luini (c. 1480-1532) both in the National Gallery, London.
- In 1914 he began work on a self-portrait which was painted in Wisteria Cottage, a decaying Georgian house Spencer rented, from the local coalman in Cookham, for use as a studio. Painted with a mirror, the painting is **bold and austere** with a **direct and penetrating gaze**, softened by the deep shadow on the right hand side – the head fills the picture space and is painted **one and a half times life size**. The art collector **Edward Marsh** bought *Self-portrait* and considered it to be "masterly...**glowing with genius**."

References

<http://www.christies.com/features/Stnley-Spencer-A-Primer-6261-1.aspx> a good summary of his life, personality and work



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Apple Gatherers*, 1912-13, 71.4 x 92.5 cm, Tate
 Stanley Spencer, *Study for Apple Gatherers*, 1912, ink, graphite and watercolour on paper, 27.6 x 32.1 cm, Tate

- This is one of Spencer's earliest major works and shows the influence of Paul Gauguin and other Post-Impressionists. However, he did not imitate but took what he wanted. Professor Tonks at the Slade said that Spencer showed signs of having **the most original mind of anyone he could remember as a student at the Slade.**
- *Apple Gatherers* was shown in the first Contemporary Art Society exhibition in 1913. It was bought by the artist Henry Lamb, who promptly sold it to the art collector Edward Marsh.



Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), *The Centurion's Servant*, 1914, 114.3 x 114.3 cm, Tate

- *The Centurion's Servant* was painted **just before the war** and indicates the style and subject matter that Spencer would explore for most of the rest of his life. It personalises a Bible story concerning the faith of a **Roman centurion** in Jesus. Spencer has set the story in the servant's room in his house and the boy on the bed has Spencer's own features. The people praying by the bed are following a custom his mother told him about. The room is bare apart from the bed which has a thick comfortable mattress and a jaunty red skirt. The boy does not look ill but looks troubled and has just put down a book.
- *Tate website*, "Spencer liked the story in St Luke Chapter 7, in which after marvelling at the **centurion's faith**, Jesus heals his sick servant without entering the house. Bringing this into his own time and place, Spencer set the scene in the **maid's bedroom** in the **attic of his home**, a room which **he too never entered**. Sometimes he heard **strange voices** coming from the room which he later discovered was simply the maid talking through the wall to another servant. Thus, the biblical narrative reminded him of experiences in his own life. These also included kneeling in prayer at church, and Cookham villagers **praying around the bed** of a dying man, a **custom his mother had told him about**. The youth on the

bed has Spencer's own features.”

Notes

- The Faith of the Centurion
 - Chapter 7: When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The **centurion heard of Jesus** and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and **heal his servant**. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” So Jesus went with them.
 - He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why **I did not even consider myself worthy** to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”
 - When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “**I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.**” Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.



Home leave. Stanley, Percy seated and Sydney Spencer c 1915,
copyright Stanley Spencer Gallery

Home leave. Stanley, Percy seated and Sydney Spencer c 1915, copyright Stanley Spencer Gallery

- At the start of the war Spencer was keen to enlist but because of his **weak physique** his mother persuaded him to enter the **ambulance service**. He spent almost four years away at war. He first worked at Beaufort War Hospital, Bristol, a large Victorian gothic building. He left in 1916 for overseas duty and following ten weeks training he was sent to Macedonia (a Balkan nation north of Greece and between Albania and Bulgaria). In 1917, he **volunteered to join an infantry unit** and he spent **two and a half years on the front line** fighting German and Bulgarian troops. He was eventually **invalided out** following persistent bouts of **malaria**. His survival while so many of his fellow soldiers, including his brother Sydney, were killed marked his attitude to life and death for the rest of his life.

Notes

- Stanley was small and wiry and had a very energetic yet engaging personality. He could also be quite exhausting and would talk for hours with his mind flying free. He would vocalise or write his thoughts on every aspect of his work and left behind a vast archive of letters, notes and jottings.

- One biographer wrote, 'His four years at the Slade were not altogether happy. He was marked out as a misfit by his physical appearance: his diminutiveness (he was only 5 feet 2 inches), his heavy fringe, and pudding-basin haircut. His aura of other-worldliness was enhanced by the fact that he commuted daily by train from Berkshire. He was known jeeringly as Cookham, and terrified by being put upside-down in a sack.' (Fiona McCarthy, *Stanley Spencer: An English Vision*, 1997)
- Percy was one of three Spencer boys to enlist at the start of World War One. Stanley served in the east, in Macedonia, while Sydney joined Percy on the western front. Only Sydney never made it home: awarded the Military Cross for bravery, he was killed in 1918 at the age of twenty-nine.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Travoy's Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing-Station at Smol, Macedonia, September 1916, 1919*, 182.8 x 218.4 cm, Imperial War Museum

2. World War One, Travoy's Arriving with Wounded (1919)

- Towards the end of the war Spencer was approached by the **British War Memorials Committee** to complete a commission. It was commissioned for the proposed **Hall of Remembrance**, which was never built. The Commission suggested a **religious service** at the front **but Spencer wanted to show a real event**. This shows the wounded from the previous day's attack queueing to be treated by the surgeons in an old Greek church that was used as a dressing station and operating theatre. Spencer wrote that the men were calm and peaceful despite their wounds and **he saw it in religious terms** as like Christ on the Cross and the **Resurrection through the efforts of the surgeons**. In 1938, Spencer wrote, 'I meant it not a scene of horror but a scene of redemption'.

Notes

- A travoy is a frame structure used to drag loads across land using horses.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Swan Upping at Cookham*, 1915-19, 148 x 116.2 cm, Tate

- This is one of his more famous works which was started in 1915 and he continued working on it after he was discharged in 1918. He finished after he was demobilised in 1919.
- Swan upping was an annual ceremony held at the end of July between London and Henley. It is undertaken by the Royal Swanherd and the Swan Wardens of the Dyers' and Vintners' Companies in the City. Young swans are caught and marked in the same way as their parents, with one nick in their beak to mean the bird is owned by the Dyers and two nicks for the Vintners. The Queen's swans are not marked and all unmarked swans on the Thames are hers by right.
- Throughout the war Spencer thought he would die and his main regret was that he would not be able to return to his little bedroom in Cookham to finish this picture. As an infantry man every assignment he was given was more dangerous than the last. He said you can imagine what he felt when at long last he entered his bedroom and saw this half-finished picture turned towards the wall of his bedroom. He went over to the painting and turned it round so they were at long last looking at each other again, 'it seemed unbelievable but it was a fact'.

- Spencer had begun the painting by making a small oil study and several drawings from memory before visiting Turks Boatyard beside Cookham Bridge to confirm his composition. Spencer worked systematically from top to bottom on the canvas but had only completed the top two-thirds of the picture when he had to leave it in 1915. Returning to the work Spencer found it difficult to continue after his war-time experiences, often stating "It is not proper or sensible to expect to paint after such experience." It was exhibited at the new English Art Club in 1920 and bought by J. L. Behrend.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *The Last Supper*, 1920

- This work shows how Spencer emphasizes the normality of those present but in doing so he leaves us with two rows of bony feet projecting a different angle from the bodies. A large cut loaf is held by Jesus while John sleeps on his shoulder. To the right of Christ is a figure that could be Judas eating something while a hand that appears to belong to no one appears between that figure and Jesus.
- He had just returned from Macedonia and found Cookham very different. Following an argument with his father he moved in with Lord Slessor and painted a number of works.
- *The Last Supper* is probably set inside the old Malthouse in Cookham. He started the work in 1915 but did not complete it until 1920. It was purchased by Henry Slessor for £150.

References

<http://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=1058&action=show&lang=en>



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *The Resurrection, Cookham*, 1924-7, 274.3 x 548.6 cm, Tate Britain

3. 1920 to 1927, *The Resurrection, Cookham* (1927)

- Following the Great War it was a time of crisis and self-doubt. All the old certainties of what it means to be British had disappeared. Stanley's younger brother Sidney had been killed on the front but Spencer and his family did not hear any news until he returned to Cookham three months after the event. He found the whole village had changed and he started to paint the old Cookham he remembered as a boy but transformed in a series of Biblical stories. The local brewery hosts the Last Supper and Jesus carries the cross past Spencer's home. The biggest event took place in the village churchyard. He painted *Resurrection* which depicts the moment at the end of days when everyone awakes and travels to Paradise. Everyone is reborn into Stanley's childhood village of Cookham.
- Spencer described the painting as a scene of great happiness. Spencer shows himself in the centre and on the book-like grave on the right and Hilda Carline three times, coming over the stile on the left, pushing a sunflower joyfully against her face and lying on the grave in the centre, Hilda was the love of his life and although Spencer was later seduced by the charms of Patricia Preece he continued

to visit and write to her for the rest of his life. Spencer was led on by Patricia but she was a lesbian so he must have been very naïve or seeking the impossible. He divorced Hilda and three days later married Patricia. After the wedding Patricia left for the 'honeymoon' with her partner and Spencer stayed behind with Hilda.

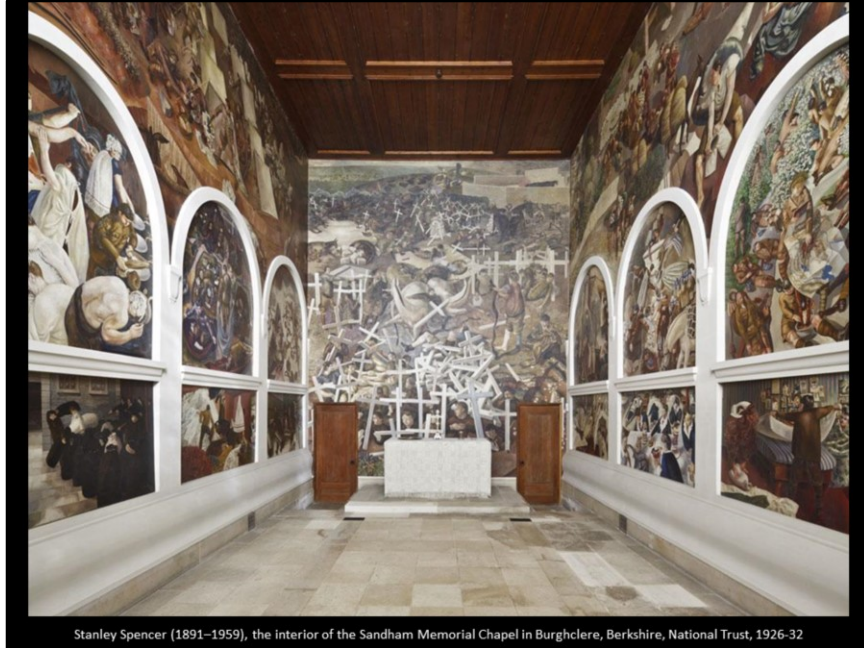
- Spencer stayed in Cookham until 1920 when he **moved to Bourne End**, just over a mile away, to stay with the trade union lawyer Henry Slessor and his wife. He worked on a series of paintings for them before **moving to Steep in Hampshire** where he worked on murals for the village hall. In 1923 he **stayed in Poole**, Dorset, with Henry Lamb (1883-1960, British painter and founder of the Camden Town Group) and worked on another mural scheme. This work convinced the **Behrend's** to commission Spencer to design murals for a chapel at **Burghclere** in memory of Mary Behrend's brother, Lieutenant Henry Willoughby Sandham.
- In **1925**, Spencer **married Hilda Carline**, then a student at the Slade and daughter, Shirin, was born in November of that year and a second daughter, Unity, in 1930. In October 1923, Spencer started **renting Henry Lamb's studio in Hampstead** where he **began work on *The Resurrection, Cookham***.
- *The Resurrection* is perhaps Spencer's most famous painting. The resurrection is one of the most challenging of all traditional Bible subjects but Spencer, by the power of his personal approach, has created a triumphant masterpiece. The picture **created a sensation** when shown in his one-man exhibition at the **Goupil Gallery** in London in 1927 and was **bought immediately** for the **national collections for £1,000**.
- The critic of *The Times* called it '**... the most important picture painted by any English artist in the present century ...** What makes it so astonishing is the combination in it of careful detail with the modern freedom of form. It is as if a **Pre-Raphaelite had shaken hands with a Cubist.**' and even the Bloomsbury critic Roger Fry, who generally disapproved of narrative painting, wrote 'it is highly arresting and intriguing ... a very personal conception carried through with unfailing nerve and conviction.'
- Spencer believed that the divine rested in all creation. He saw his home town of Cookham as a paradise in which everything is invested with mystical significance. The local churchyard here becomes the setting for the resurrection of the dead. **Christ is enthroned in the church porch, cradling three babies, with God the Father standing behind.** Along the wall of the church is a **row of prophets** including **Moses**, with a **dark beard**, holding the tablets of the **Ten Commandments**. The rest of the churchyard is filled with people resurrecting from their tombs. The **group of black people** emerging from sun-baked soil implies that Spencer's conception embraces the whole of humanity. Spencer made it clear that his Resurrection was a **joyous event** and that the resurrected are already in Heaven: '**... in the main they resurrect to such a state of joy that they are content**

... to remain where they are.' Even '**the punishment of the Bad**', said Spencer, '**was to be no more than that their coming out of the graves was not so easy** as in the case of the Good'.

- Spencer himself appears near the centre, naked, leaning against a grave stone; his fiancée Hilda lies sleeping in a bed of ivy. At the top left, risen souls are transported to Heaven in the pleasure steamers that then ploughed the Thames.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/spencer-the-resurrection-cookham-n04239/text-illustrated-companion>



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), the interior of the Sandham Memorial Chapel in Burghclere, Berkshire, National Trust, 1926-32

Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), the interior of the Sandham Memorial Chapel in Burghclere, Berkshire, National Trust, 1926-32

4. Burghclere ('Berk-cler') 1926-1932, Sandham Memorial Chapel

- The Sandham Memorial Chapel (Burghclere, Berkshire) commission was a huge undertaking. It was undertaken between **1926 and 1932** and consists of a cycle of 19 paintings that are scenes of the First World War based on his own experiences as a medical orderly in Bristol and on active service in Macedonia.
- It was commissioned by Mary and Louis Behrend as a memorial to Mary's brother, Lieutenant Henry Willoughby Sandham who died at the end of the First World War.
- The end wall is 21 x 17.5 feet, the eight lunettes are 7 feet high, each above a predella, with two 28 feet long irregularly shaped strips between the lunettes and the ceiling.
- The Behrends were exceptionally generous patrons and not only paid for the Chapel to be built to Spencer's specifications but also paid the rent on the London studio where he completed *The Resurrection*, *Cookham* and **built a house for him and Hilda** to live in nearby while working at Burghclere, as Spencer would be painting the canvases in situ. The chapel was designed to Spencer's specifications by the architect **Lionel Pearson** and was modelled on **Giotto's Arena Chapel** in

Padua. It is now **run by the National Trust.**

- Spencer worked on the Chapel for six-years and it became a process of remembrance and exorcism. It is dominated by the Resurrection scene behind the altar, in which dozens of British soldiers lay the white wooden crosses that marked their graves at the feet of a distant Christ. He explained the emphasis on the colossal resurrection scene, "**I had buried so many people and saw so many bodies** that I felt **death could not be the end** of everything."
- Spencer would refer to it as his '**Holy-Box**', whilst the architect and patrons would privately refer to it as Spencer's '**God-Box**'.
- Amanda Bradley, assistant curator of pictures at the National Trust, said the chapel "**is one of the greatest glories of art in Northern Europe.** It is Stanley Spencer's masterpiece and is arguably one of the greatest modern British artistic schemes ever conceived."

Description

- The series begins with a lunette depicting shell-shocked troops arriving at the gates of Beaufort, Bristol, continues with a scene of kit inspection at the RAMC Training Depot in Hampshire which is followed by scenes of Macedonia. Spencer did **not depict heroism and sacrifice**, but rather in panels such as *Scrubbing the Floor*, *Bed-making*, *Filling Tea Urns* and *Sorting and Moving Kit Bags*.
- There is an absence of violence *The Dugout* panel was based on Spencer's thought of "how marvellous it would be if one morning, when we came out of our dug-outs, we found that somehow everything was peace and the war was no more."
- The scene, *Map Reading* offers a contrast to the dark earth of the hospital and military camps in the other panels and shows a company of soldiers resting by a roadside paying little attention to **the only officer** depicted among the hundreds of figures Spencer painted for the Chapel. Bilberry bushes fill the background of the painting, making the scene appear green and Arcadian which seems to prefigure the paradise promised in the *Resurrection of the Soldiers* on the end, alter, wall.
- The work includes *Camp at Karasuli* and *Riverbed at Todorova* and *The Resurrection of Soldiers* on the end wall.
- Spencer imagined the *Resurrection of the Soldiers* taking place outside the walled village of Kalinova in Macedonia with soldiers rising out of their graves and **handing** in identical **white crosses to a Christ figure** towards the top of the wall.
- The Arena chapel is so called because it was built in the area around the old Roman amphitheatre, the Arena. It is also known as the Scrovegni Chapel after the patron Enrico degli Scrovegni of Padua, a wealthy money lender who had the chapel built in c. 1303-5. It is likely that he built the chapel to atone for the sin of usury (lending money for profit). We do know that Dante Alighieri, in his *Divine Comedy*, consigned his father to Ring 3 of the Seventh Circle of Hell for usury. The Seventh Circle was for acts of violence and Ring 3 was for Blasphemers, Sodomites

and Usurers. The complex structure of Hell described in the *Divine Comedy* was the invention of Dante although it is loosely based on the ideas of Aristotle.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), Sandham Memorial Chapel, right side, 1926-32 and *Bed-making*



Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), *Christ Teaching at Cookham Regatta*, 1954-59, 200.6 x 536 cm, Stanley Spencer Gallery

- Nearly all of Spencer's early work was painted from his imagination but from the early 1930s a large proportion of his work was made from direct observation. He could be seen around Cookham with his easel that he pushed around in a pram. From the beginning his technique was to produce sketches and then a detailed drawing. He would then square this up, square the canvas and transfer the drawing to the canvas. He would then work from the top down and across painting in finished detail. He rarely went back and corrected his work.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *St Francis and the Birds*, 1935, 66 x 58.4 cm, Tate

5. Cookham, 1932-1935, The Church House Project

- In **1934** the Royal Academy accepted all the paintings Spencer submitted and the reception was excellent. It was described as '**Stanley Spencer's Year**'.
- The Times reviewer introduced a **cautionary note**, '... it is reasonably certain that in **fifty years time** he will be recognised as one of the very few contemporary painters who have **really counted** in the history of English art.' But he added, 'Mr Spencer is as unwelcome to contemporary aesthetic opinion as he is likely to be a stumbling block to the general public ... Like all originals Mr Spencer is a **disconcerting artist**, and **neither illustratively nor formally is his meaning always clear**.'

The Church House Project

- During WWI Spencer had conceived of a **chapel of peace** and love based on **cycles of sacred and profane love**. This concept was further developed following his experience with the Burghclere chapel. The original layout of the Church House mirrored the **geography of Cookham** with a High Street, School Land and a path beside the Thames. He imagined bedrooms as chapels and fireplaces as altars.

- There would be a **chapel dedicated to Hilda** and another to a family servant, Elise Munday. Spencer had at least **two significant affairs** during his life, one with **Daphne Charlton** while at Leonard Stanley, and the other with **Charlotte Murray**, a Jungian analyst, when he was in Glasgow, and there were to be **chapels dedicated to both of them**.
- Although the **Chapel House was never built** Spencer returned to the idea for the **rest of his life** and many of his paintings were **imagined as forming part** of the decoration of the house. These included the two paintings Spencer submitted for the 1935 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, this painting, ***Saint Francis and the Birds*** and ***The Dustman or The Lovers***. The Royal Academy accepted three other paintings but **rejected these two** and Spencer felt that the Academy was trying to control the direction of his work so he **resigned in protest**. The rejection of the *Saint Francis* picture was particularly galling for Spencer as the model for the figure of Saint Francis had been his own father, wearing his own dressing gown and slippers, which Spencer had intended to hang in the nave of the Church-House.
- One reviewer spoke of the ‘... **disproportionate cranium** and stone-like beard [of St Francis, which] assume the **grotesque [sic] appearance** belonging to one of the uglier fishes, the **hammer-head shark**. Mr Spencer’s St. Francis is a caricature which passes the **bounds of good taste**, [and] which is equally poor in drawing, design and composition’.
- Other reviewers implied mental instability describing St Francis as ‘a **distorted doll**’ but this was ‘a fault not of the painter’s hand, but of his head and heart.’
- Other critics **praised Spencer’s vision**. One wrote that the Academicians were ‘Sub-Realists’ who lacked visual vigour but Spencer was a ‘**Super Realist**’ and they were ‘visionary as well as visual, [they] see in one way or another violently or strangely ... under whose contemplation the **form transforms, swells or deflates** ... is given the freedom, even the **irrationality of dreams** ...’ **Most of the works** at the Summer Exhibition were ‘**drenched in the jam of sentiment**’ but Spencer’s St Francis was ‘more like **Giotto’s stout friar** than are the sentimentalised figures of non-Catholic fancy.’



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *The Dustmen or The Lovers*, 1934, 115 x 123.5 cm, Laing Art Gallery

- As a result of the publicity commentators took sides and those against Spencer objected to his works on the grounds of unacceptable distortion and even mental instability. One critic who had attacked Spencer as early as 1915 wrote that *The Dustman or The Lovers* 'is covered with an **inextricable muddle of repellent shapes**. We are taken beyond the frontier of reason into a world of **madness and nightmares**.'
- A number of critics said that if Spencer **stuck to landscapes and portraits** and painted their normal appearance, which 'he **can do to perfection**' then the present controversy would never have arisen. This was true but **missed the point** that it is Spencer's **unique vision**, style and choice of subject matter that is **the reason** he has '**really counted in the history of English art**'.
- In this painting five women at the bottom left look at the lovers and two present rubbish as if making a religious offering. At the top right two dustmen look towards the lovers in consternation. Between them a short dustman with brown corduroy trousers **stares up to Heaven** while held by a large **woman wearing a white dress** and holding a milk jug. One critic wrote, 'This sort of patchy, illogical vividness is

one which the material eye alone can never capture, but which the **inward eye of memory** can sometimes present to us with **bomb-like force** just when we least expect it. To experience such inward flashes is common enough, but to be able to **capture them** and fix them for ever on canvas is the **gift of genius**.'

- The controversy meant that Spencer now had little chance of finding a patron to fund the building of the Church House.



Stanley Spencer, *The Lovers (the Dustmen)*, 1934

Stanley Spencer, *The Lovers (The Dustmen)*, a video based on Spencer's own words.

- This video was produced by the Hepworth Wakefield Gallery in Yorkshire for their Spencer exhibition, 25 June to 5 October 2016.
- The exhibition explores the seemingly conflicting themes that Spencer fused together in his richly detailed paintings, of **religion and sexuality**, work and leisure, nature and industry, highlighting Spencer's distinctive view of everyday life. As Spencer himself put it, '*I am on the side of **angels and dirt***'.
- Stanley Spencer fans and collectors include the **late David Bowie**, who narrated the BBC Omnibus Special about the painter in 2001. Spencer was among Bowie's favourite British artists. **Adam Ant** (born Stuart Goddard) spent summer holidays in Cookham and grew up being inspired by the painter, who he calls his "**favourite artist of all time**"; **Andrew Lloyd Webber**, who owns several works by Spencer and considers both **Stanley Spencer and Francis Bacon as two of the greatest British painters of the twentieth century** as well as British sculptor **Anthony Gormley**, broadcaster **Jon Snow** and art historian **James Fox**, who recently became President of the Friends of Stanley Spencer Gallery.

References

- <http://www.hepworthwakefield.org/stanley-spencer/>



May 1937, left to right: Dorothy Hepworth, Patricia Preece (1894-1966, born Ruby Vivian Preece), Stanley Spencer (1891-1959) and Jas Wood at the wedding of Preece and Spencer

May 1937, left to right: Dorothy Hepworth (1898-1978), Patricia Preece (1894-1966, born Ruby Vivian Preece), Stanley Spencer (1891-1959) and James 'Jas' Wood, an old friend and the best man at the wedding of Preece and Spencer

- We now begin what *The Guardian* described as "**the most bizarre domestic soap opera in the history of British art.**"

6. Divorce and Remarriage, 1935-1938

- In **1925** Spencer **married Hilda Carline** (1889-1950, aged 61) then a student at the Slade and the sister of the artists Richard and Sydney Carline. A daughter, Shirin, was born in November of that year and a second daughter, Unity, in 1930.
- In **1927** Patricia Preece, an artist, moved to Cookham.
- In **1929** Spencer **first met Patricia Preece** (1894-1966, aged 72) at a picnic and he gradually became infatuated. Preece was a member of the Bloomsbury Group and as a teenager had caused the **death of W.S. Gilbert** of Gilbert and Sullivan fame. She lost her footing while **swimming in a lake** and the 74 year old Gilbert dived in to save her and died of a heart attack. She had a lifelong relationship with the talented artist **Dorothy Hepworth** (1898-1978, aged 80) who she met at the Slade. They often **claimed to be sisters** or just **good friends**. Hepworth had a wealthy

family who enabled them to buy a home and a studio. Preece's early work was praised by Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and Roger Fry but later she **signed many of the shy Hepworths** works and sold them as her own. She had a **reputation for flirting** with male admirers before rejecting them when it became more serious. The Hepworths lost their fortune in the Great Depression, and from 1930, Preece and Hepworth were **struggling to make mortgage payments**.

- By **1932** Spencer was back in Cookham with his family living in a large house called **Lindworth**. He painted landscapes and other studies of the area and in 1932 he was elected an **Associate of the Royal Academy** and exhibited 10 works at the Venice Biennale. Spencer was becoming **dissatisfied with married life** and **Hilda was often away** looking after her sick brother.
- In **1933** Preece **first modelled** for Spencer. The summer when he went to paint in Switzerland **she joined him there**. When they returned to Cookham **Hilda moved to Hampstead** and **Preece took over his financial affairs** and he **signed over the deeds of his house to her**.
- In May **1937**, **Hilda had had enough** and a **decree absolute** was granted. Even then Spencer still imagined an idyllic life with Hilda and Preece. Within a week of the divorce Spencer married Preece but **she was a lesbian** and continued to live with her **partner Dorothy Hepworth** and **refused to consummate** the marriage. The reason she gave was that after their wedding she had gone to St Ives for the 'honeymoon' and Spencer remained in Cookham to finish a painting. Hilda visited him and stayed the night and Preece **professed shock at his adultery** and **refused to have sexual relations with him thereafter** but she also **refused to divorce him**. Spencer got into financial trouble and Patricia evicted him from her home and he was supported by his friends in London. He continued to love and visit Hilda who died in 1950. After he was knighted in 1959 Patricia insisted on being called Lady Spencer and claimed a pension as his widow.
- In September **1937** Spencer returned to Cookham with **no real marital relationship** at all but he seemed, according to a friend, **not cast down but excited** and he, unexpectedly, began one of the most intense periods of his life, the **period of his erotic paintings**.
- Patricia **laid down rules** for Stanley, such as the need to produce **one landscape painting every 10 days** in order to cover his expenses. Landscapes were easier to sell than portraits and Stanley followed Patricia's instructions.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Portrait of Patricia Preece*, 1933, 84 x 74cm, Southampton Art Gallery

Dorothy Hepworth (1898-1978) aka Patricia Preece, *Girl Resting*, date unknown, signed 'Patricia Preece' and titled on the stretcher bar, 68.6 x 50.7 cm

An example of a work by Dorothy Hepworth passed off as a work by Patricia Preece.

- Spencer had drawn portraits all his life but usually in the form of small sketches of friends. During the 1930s Spencer became more and more **isolated** from his artistic friends and his portraits were almost **entirely of Hilda Carline and Patricia Preece**. Spencer and Preece **met in 1929** but became **good friends in 1932** and by 1933 she appeared in his paintings. In Cookham Spencer no longer had access to models and Preece agreed to sit for him, **at first clothed and then nude**. In the first of these paintings, ***Portrait of Patricia Preece***, she looks large-boned, slack and leaning awkwardly on a table. Her expression is difficult to read but it is not relaxed or joyful but disdainful and cold.
- **Patricia Preece** was an **English artist associated with the Bloomsbury Group** who became the second wife of Stanley Spencer. In 1918, Preece enrolled at the **Slade School of Fine Art**, where she **met a talented artist, Dorothy Hepworth**, who

became her **lifelong companion**.

- In 1929, Preece met Cookham artist Stanley Spencer and his artist wife, Hilda Carline, while she was substituting as a **waitress in a teashop** in Cookham. Spencer's fantasy was to have both Carline and Preece as wives, both inspiring his art. In 1935, Preece accompanied Spencer for a second commission in Switzerland.
- Between 1935 and 1937, Spencer painted his famous series of nude portraits of Preece. Preece, aware of Spencer's fantasy for her to be his wife, insisted that he must obtain a **divorce** from Carline before she would marry him. Spencer became convinced that if he married Preece, he would then be able to **persuade Carline** to join them in a **ménage-à-trois**.
- After receiving numerous pleading letters from her husband, **Carline divorced Spencer in 1937**, and less than a week later, he married Preece in Maidenhead. Preece and Hepworth, however, travelled together to St. Ives for the 'honeymoon', while Spencer remained in Cookham to finish a painting. **Carline** went to Cookham and, finding a warm welcome from Spencer, she **spent the night with him**. Spencer explained his idea of a three-way marriage to her, but she could not accept being his mistress, having been his wife. Preece professed to be **shocked by his 'adultery'** with Carline and refused thereafter to have sexual relations with him. Preece persuaded Spencer to **sign his house and financial affairs over to her**.
- Now **maintaining two families and three houses**, Spencer's **finances rapidly deteriorated**, and he was **sued for debt**. Preece continued to live with Hepworth, **evicting Spencer** from his home in order **to rent it out**. **Spencer fled to London**, where his museum friends and art dealer helped him to put his **finances in order**, although he was **forced to live modestly** for many years.
- Spencer had two serious affairs but continued to love, and frequently visit, his first wife, until her death in 1950. **Spencer attempted to divorce Preece in the 1950s**, but she **hired lawyers and prevented this**. After he was **knighted in 1959**, she **always insisted on being styled Lady Spencer** and claimed a pension as his widow. During the post-war years, she also conducted a profitable hobby in trading antiques.
- **Hepworth came from a wealthy family who supported her** and Preece including buying their house in Cookham. The sociable **Preece signed many of the shy Hepworth's paintings** and negotiated with dealers to exhibit and **sell the work as Preece's**, fooling many in the art world, including the artist Augustus John, who declared Preece one of the six greatest women artists in England. After Preece had died Hepworth continued to paint, and her paintings continued to be exhibited under Preece's name.

References

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patricia_Preece



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Self Portrait with Patricia Preece*, 1937, Fitzwilliam Museum

Walter Richard Sickert (1860-1942), *The Camden Town Murder or What Shall We Do about the Rent?*, c.1908, Yale Center for British Art

- Spencer was a visionary Christian artist with keen observational skills. Although they may appear anomalous, he regarded his exploration of **sexual themes and his nude paintings** as a **fundamental part of his work** and he thought they should always be interspersed with his other work at exhibitions to **'convey the range of my work...they have such an effect on the other works.'**
- I have selected one work to represent the erotic paintings of this period.
- From 1933 onwards Preece started to model for Spencer, at first clothed and then nude. Spencer never made any attempt to idealise her and shows her heavy features and in *Nude, Portrait of Patricia Preece* (c. 1935), her pendulous breasts. By 1936 the intensity of his desire has him naked and kneeling beside the bed on which she reclines.
- It is important to realise that these fiercely realistic nudes were not being painted at this time. We must wait twenty years until the Lucien Freud nudes of the mid-

1950s. The only earlier nudes that are comparable are those of Walter Sickert including those known as the Camden Town nudes.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/lisa-tickner-walter-sickert-the-camden-town-murder-and-tabloid-crime-r1104355>



- Wendy Beckett (born 25 February 1930), better known as Sister Wendy, is a British hermit, consecrated virgin, and art historian who became well known internationally during the 1990s when she presented a series of documentaries for the BBC on the history of art. Her programmes, like *Sister Wendy's Odyssey* and *Sister Wendy's Grand Tour*, often drew a 25 percent share of the British viewing audience and they are still being shown on PBS in America in 2016.
- She was born in South Africa and raised in Edinburgh. She entered a Roman Catholic school at 16 and completed her studies at St. Anne's College, Oxford where she obtained a first class honours degree in English literature.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Hilda, Unity and Dolls*, 1937, Leeds Art Gallery

- This painting was produced **three months after the divorce** from his first wife Hilda. It captures the grief of Hilda and their seven-year old daughter Unity. In the painting Hilda's averted eyes suggest still-raw emotions, whilst Unity's challenging gaze may speak of child-like recriminations. But it's the apparently **eyeless dolls** that serve to heighten the painting's sense of loss and dislocation. The dolls' eyes have produced many hundreds of words of explanation by art critics and historians including the possibility that Unity poked out their eyes. We now know the doll's still have eyes as the one called **Golden Slumbers Sonia Rose** was shown at the Henley Literary Festival in **2015 by 85-year-old Unity Spencer**. The doll still had **working undamaged eyes** that opened and closed. In the painting Spencer has painted the eyes of both dolls as black sockets. Their black sockets reinforcing the piercing, accusing stare of his daughter Unity.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Beatitude 5: Contemplation*, 1938, Stanley Spencer Gallery

Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Beatitude 7: Romantic Meeting*, 1938, National Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand

- **The Beatitudes of Love Series (1938)**

- *Beatitude 1: Nearness* (lost)
- *Beatitude 2: Knowing* (private collection)
- *Beatitude 3: Seeing* (destroyed by fire)
- *Beatitude 4: Passion or Desire* (private collection)
- *Beatitude 5: Contemplation* (Stanley Spencer Gallery)
- *Beatitude 6: Consciousness* (private collection)
- *Beatitude 7: Romantic Meeting* (National Art Gallery, Wellington)
- *Beatitude 8: Worship* (private collection)
- *Beatitude 9: Age* (possibly destroyed)
- *Beatitudes of Love: Sociableness* (also known as *Toasting*) (private collection)

- The odd appearance of the *Beatitude* series further distanced Spencer from the

public. His long time patron Edward Marsh reacted with horror, '**Oh Stanley, are people really like that?**' Spencer said, 'What's the matter with them? **They are all right aren't they?**' Spencer denied that he had ever intended to depart from natural appearances. He sometimes even denied that his paintings were distorted at all. In about 1957 he said, 'I do not distort deliberately. **I have no intention or wish to distort.**'

- Spencer explained that **his paintings expressed a deep inner need** that is not '**covered by any immediate object I see.**' This longing or need he felt he saw as proof of the existence of what he longed for and that bringing it about was '**something akin to what it would be like to perform a miracle.**' In other words, his imagination generated a need to express certain feelings and ideas which he then expressed as naturally and accurately as he could. If other people thought they were distorted then they had failed to see the vision he had seen in his imagination.
- Spencer realised his people and his loves were not conventionally beautiful. 'That these **people may not be everybody's cup of tea is not important** ... but that they are each other's does. What ever [sic] they look like they are all in all of each other's lives.'
- *The Tate website says, 'The Beatitudes* ... testify to one of Spencer's most profound insights. Figures so hideous as these have usually been confined to satire, as with the repulsive lovers painted by the German artist **Otto Dix** in the 1920s. Spencer himself used the word '**degenerate**' of his Beatitude figures - a **very loaded term** in 1938, at the height of the **Nazi campaign** against so-called 'Degenerate Art' in Germany. Far from being satirical images, however, Spencer's *Beatitudes* propose that **human love**, even of the highest and most transcendent kind, is **best articulated not through beauty, but through the grotesque.**'

Notes

- This was the last series concerned with sex in the *Church House* scheme as Spencer realised they were too obscure to be successful.
- In 1936 he produced a series of twenty nine domestic scenes (known as the ***Domestic Scenes***), landscapes and still lifes and exhibited them at Tooth's gallery. The exhibition was a great success and £1,825 was raised of which Spencer received £414 (after commission £608, framing £112 and repaying a £700 cash advance). Spencer struggled between producing acceptable works for sale and large-scale works for his *Church House*.
- Since at least the 18th century, the **grotesque** in art refers not only to the strange, fantastic, ugly or disgusting but to something that simultaneously invokes a feeling of uncomfortable **bizarreness** as well as **sympathetic pity**.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/stanley-spencer/stanley-spencer-room-4-those-couple-things>



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Christ in the Wilderness: The Scorpion*, 1939, 56 x 56 cm, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

Christ in the Wilderness series, all 56 x 56 cm, all Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

- *The Foxes Have Holes*
 - *He Departed into a Mountain to Pray*
 - *The Scorpion*
 - *Driven by the Spirit into the Wilderness*
 - *Consider the Lilies*
 - *Rising from Sleep in the Morning*
 - *The Eagles*
 - *The Hen*
- In 1938 Spencer was severely depressed and moved from Cookham to Swiss Cottage, London. His second marriage had failed and many of his paintings were unsaleable. He went into retreat and painted the *Christ in the Wilderness* series. He was happier isolated in his own religious world. He was seeking, like Christ, to re-establish our oneness with the world. He wrote, 'After sweeping the floor and

dusting a bit. I would sit down on one of the two chairs and look at the floor. **Oh, the joy of just that.**' Christ's body and clothes often follow the shape of the wilderness and Christ is shown associating and at peace with wild animals and insects. He was very happy at the time, he wrote, 'It would suit me if I felt able to never stir again from just what I am doing now.'



Leonard McCombe, *Stanley Spencer*, bromide print, 2 October 1943, 36.7 x 24.8 cm, NPG, Spencer in the Glasgow shipyards with a look of utter concentration.

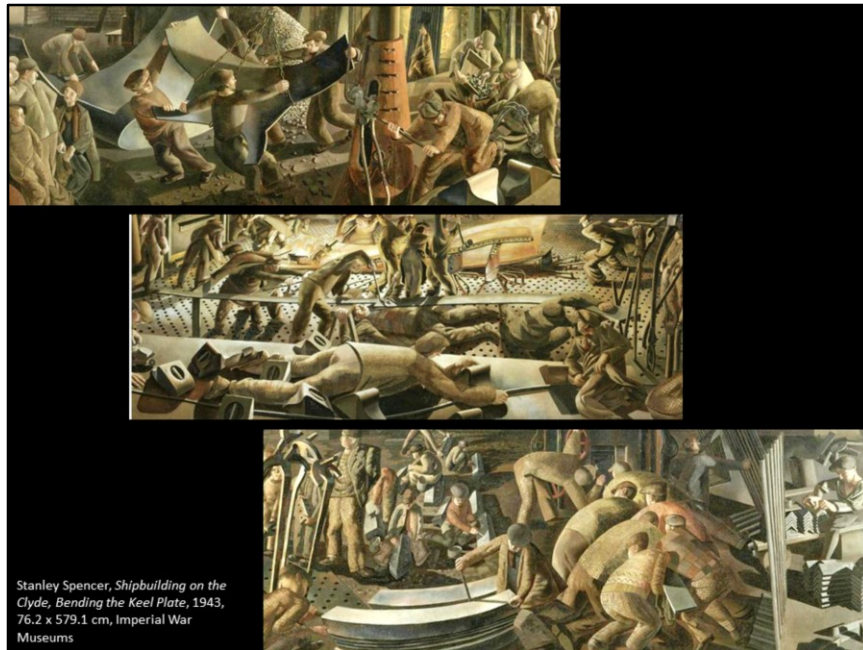
Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Shipbuilding on the Clyde: Burners*, 1940, Imperial War Museum, central panel, 106.7 x 153.4cm, the side panels of the triptych are 50.8 x 203.2cm, the Government commissioned Baynard Press to produce 1,000 lithographs to use in factories, canteens and other public places for propaganda purposes

- **Spencer's finances were at a low point**, he had been sent away by Patricia and there was no hope of reconciliation with Hilda. From 1938, his agent, Dudley Tooth managed his finances and when the war started he wrote to the War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC) seeking employment for Spencer.
- On **1 September 1939** the Second World War started. In **May 1940** he was sent to **Glasgow shipyard** on the Clyde and he proposed a scheme of **64 canvases** to be displayed on four sides of a room. WAAC agreed to 11 canvases each up to 6 metres long. He produced ***Burners*** and ***Caulkers*** in 1940 and *Burners* was purchased for £300 by the WAAC who commissioned ***Welders***. WAAC held him in the highest regard and even went along with his idiosyncratic demands including his **refusal to fill in any forms** or even sign a contract.

- Between trips to Glasgow he rented a room in Epsom to be near Hilda and tried to rent his old studio in Cookham but he could not afford the rent that Preece asked so the WAAC helped him financially.

Notes

- “Burners are youths about 16 to 20 years of age who can draw chalk lines on sheets of steel with an assurance that tells me what artists they could be.” Stanley Spencer, *Shipbuilding on the Clyde: Burners*, 1940
- This is the first of eight such panel combinations: *Burners*, *Riveters*, *Riggers*, *Plumbers*, *Welders*, *Furnaces*, *Bending the Keel Plate* and *The Template*. Spencer painted the works over six years in Gloucestershire (upstairs in a pub called *The White Hart Inn*), Epsom and finally Cookham. He visited the shipyard many times chaperoned by John Dodds, a foreman welder. The works are inspired by medieval religious altarpieces such as Pisano's bas relief in Florence's Duomo Campanile. The paintings show no grease or sweat, little machinery and no women and they are full of men working closely in a community of craft, skills and artistry.
- World War II directly involved more than 100 million people from over 30 countries. It was marked by the mass deaths of civilians, including the Holocaust (in which approximately 11 million people were killed) and the strategic bombing of industrial and population centres (in which approximately one million were killed, and which included the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), it resulted in an estimated 50 million to 85 million fatalities. These made World War II the deadliest conflict in human history.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Shipbuilding on the Clyde, Bending the Keel Plate*, 1943, 76.2 x 579.1 cm, Imperial War Museums

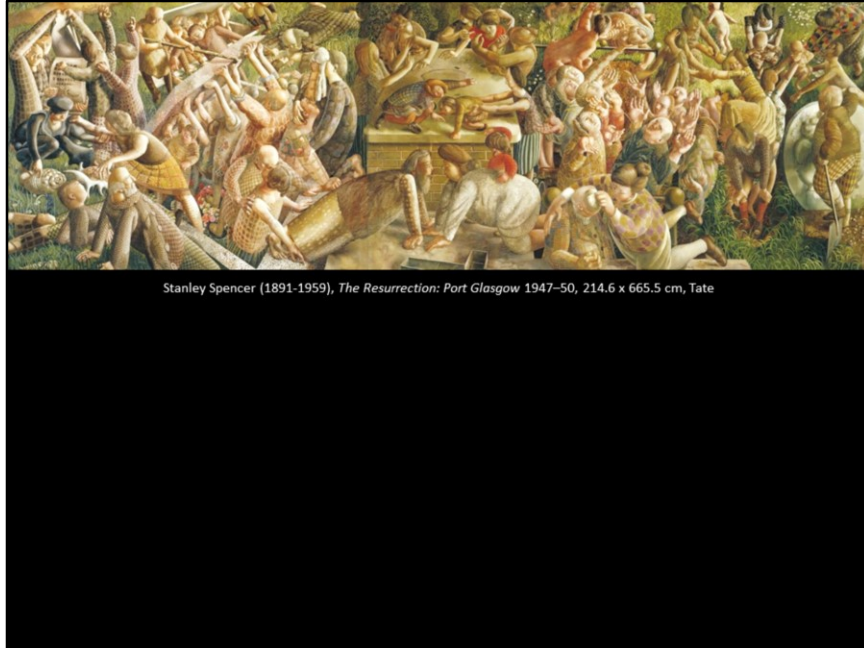
7. Port Glasgow, World War Two, 1935-1945

- **By June 1943** Spencer was having problems with the composition of the next painting in the series, ***Bending the Keel plate*** and considered abandoning it. Although he was not entirely happy with the painting, WAAC purchased it in October 1943 for 150 guineas.
- The owner of the shipyard complained about the unconventional representation and WAAC sent another artists but Spencer continued to visit and produced ***Riggers*** and ***Plumbers***. After the war the complete series *Shipbuilding on the Clyde* was offered to the National Maritime Museum but they refused and it was given to the Imperial War Museum. The work is now displayed at the Riverside Museum, Glasgow on a biannual rotation.
- In 1945 Spencer returned to Cookham in a house called **Cliveden View**, which had once belonged to his brother.

Bending the Keel Plate

- Left to right; a group of men standing and watching the following scene;

- Top: four men steering a sheet of steel hanging from chains attached to a crane, a pile of clinker or coke in the background;
- a man hammering a steel sheet in the foreground and two men decanting large bolts from a wooden box to a sack in front of a furnace.
- a man preparing a trolley-burner, a semi-automatic oxy-acetylene burner that ran on a prepared track;
- Middle: A man lying on a sheet of steel in the foreground, preparing the track for the trolley-burner;
- behind him five men work on a long and shaped length of steel.
- In the background several men work on a red-hot shoe plate which has just emerged from the furnace. One man sweeps away the detritus sticking to the plate while the others hammer it into shape; on the right are a collection of iron 'dogs' used in bending metal.
- Bottom: A group of men survey the scene; two men lever up sheet steel from a pile;
- a group of men carry a steel girder;
- a man seated on a bench works on angled pieces of steel.
- This work was originally called 'The Shoe Plate'. The central part of the canvas was worked out in a drawing in 1940 but the painting was executed in early 1943, not 1941, the date usually assigned to the work. Although Spencer was never happy with the work, the War Artist's Advisory Committee paid him 150 guineas once it was completed in October 1943.
- **Shipbuilders on the Clyde is now considered to be one of the greatest painting cycles of British art.**



Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), *The Resurrection: Port Glasgow 1947-50*, 214.6 x 665.5 cm, Tate

Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), *The Resurrection: Port Glasgow 1947-50*, 214.6 x 665.5 cm, Tate

- Spencer's position at the end of the war was very different from the beginning as the *Shipbuilding* series had established his reputation which had rapidly declined after the Royal Academy fiasco in 1935.
- He was treated by three psychoanalysts between the end of the war and his death in 1959 and the sessions alleviated his problems particularly the sexual ones. However, he had lost a lot of his pre-war zeal and painting had become a chore. However, his work commanded higher prices and he was in constant demand particularly for portraits. Spencer engaged in a lengthy correspondence with his dealer Didley Tooth who at one point wrote, 'If you would paint religious pictures without any element of sex creeping in, I would rather have them than landscapes ... However, you must do what your inner feelings dictate.'. The first product of his new approach was *The Resurrection, Port Glasgow* series.

8. Resurrection Pictures, 1945-1950

- Resurrection paintings had always been important to Spencer but after the war they became particularly significant.

- One evening while working **in Glasgow he had a vision**. He saw a **cemetery on a gentle slope** and 'I seemed then to see it rose in the midst of a great plain and that all in the plain were resurrecting and moving towards it ... **I knew then that the resurrection would be directed from this hill.**'
- His original plan was a picture 50 feet wide but this was impractical so he produced a **series of smaller paintings**. The two largest, *Resurrection: Port Glasgow*, *The Hill of Zion* and *Angels of the Apocalypse*. Each of these works was some 22 feet long and they were supplemented by other, smaller, works. Spencer wanted them displayed together but this never happened and they were sold to different collectors and galleries.
- Spencer visited Port Glasgow in 1940 to fulfil a commission to paint its shipyards and was attracted by the cemetery there. He planned a vast shaped canvas fifty feet wide which would portray the Last Judgement and Resurrection taking place in this cemetery. This painting is the central section from the project and shows Glaswegians climbing out of their graves and greeting one another, as well as raising their hands in ecstatic gratitude.
- *Resurrection: Port Glasgow* was exhibited with the *Shipbuilding on the Clyde* series for the first time in 2000 to great acclaim.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *The Temptation of St Anthony*, 1945, 121.9 x 91.4 cm, private collection

- *The Temptation of St Anthony* was painted for a competition run by a film company. The entrants included Salvador Dali, Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst. Ernst won and Spencer received a runner-up prize of \$500.
- The Saint is tempted by a writhing **sea of Hilda Carline's**. Hilda appears many times in Spencer's painting, for example, she appears three times in *The Resurrection*.
- Spencer planned a '**Hilda Chapel**' dedicated to his spiritual and erotic union with his wife. He continued to paint her and **write 100-page letters** to her after her death.

Notes

- **Carline trained as an artist** and went to the Slade School of Art. She first met Spencer in 1919 and he proposed to her on a painting holiday in Bosnia in 1922. She married him in 1925 and their daughter was born the same year. A second daughter was born in 1930. She was strong minded, a feminist and a Christian Scientist. Her desire to paint was frustrated by her domestic responsibilities. In 1932 Spencer bought a large house, 'Lindworth', in Cookham and started an affair

with Patricia Preece in 1933. Spencer was open about the relationship and in 1936 she obtained a divorce on the grounds of desertion. Four days after the divorce became absolute Spencer married Patricia Preece.



Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), *Portrait of Sibyl Williams*, 1955, 45.5 x 35.5 cm, private collection

9. Final Years, 1951 to 1959

- While in Gloucestershire before World War Two, Spencer had embarked on a series of, eventually, over 100 pencil works, known as the Scrapbook Drawings. In 1950, the outgoing president of the Royal Academy, **Alfred Munnings** got hold of some of these drawings and **initiated a police prosecution against Spencer for obscenity**. It was reported in the press that the, unnamed, owner of the pictures agreed to destroy them. Spencer also appears to have removed some drawings from his private scrapbooks and continued to ensure that the ***Leg of Mutton Nude*** would not be exhibited during his lifetime. He was awarded the CBE and the new President of the Royal Academy, Gerald Kelly, who had supported Spencer in the obscenity case, persuaded him to **re-join the Royal Academy**, as an Associate before being elected an Academician. Spencer has resigned in 1935 following an argument about the rejection of two of his paintings.
- In 1950 Spencer returned to the Royal Academy indicating not a change on Spencer's part but a new liberalization of the Academy brought about by a new president, **Gerald Kelly**, who followed the **arch-traditionalist Alfred Munnings**.

Munnings had held back British art for many years. The Guardian wrote, the 'Academy [is] beginning to move in the right way'.

- By 1950 Spencer had, at last, received public recognition and he started to receive a string of portrait commissions. Previously he had painted portraits only of those people he knew well. Spencer insisted on accurately rendered detail, an informal setting and an indifference to trends and historical influences which together create a unique and strikingly contemporary feel.
- The work bears some resemblance to Lucien Freud's work but whereas Freud emphasizes isolation, tension and desire, as Spencer did in his 1930s portraits by the 1950s Spencer's portraits were relaxed and sincere. All his sitters, young and old, beautiful and ugly were treated equally and inclusively demonstrating his love of all humanity.
- "The sitter of the **present work is Sibyl Williams (née Grain) who married Eric Williams in 1948**. Eric had been a **wartime pilot** and was awarded the MC in 1944 after his ingenious **escape from Stalag Luft III** in Silesia (later part of Poland). He **wrote several books** on military history including *Goon on the Block* (1945) and *The Wooden Horse* (1945), both of which were bestsellers. Sibyl was Eric's second wife and had been appointed MBE for her service as an officer in the **Women's Royal Naval Service** and personal secretary to the admiral (submarines) during the war." (Christies)

Notes

- This painting sold at Christie's in 2005 for £142,400.

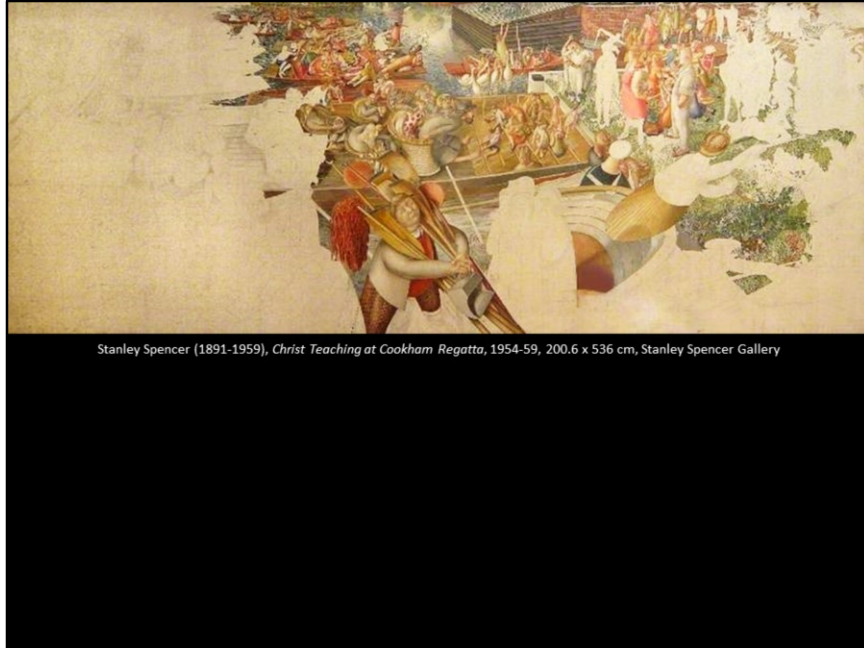
References

- <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/AAA/AAA-4512395-details.aspx>



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Mr and Mrs Baggett*, 1956, 61 x 91.5 cm, Stanley Spencer Gallery

- Commissioned as a single portrait of either sitter, Spencer chose instead to paint them together with startling immediacy in their Highgate dining room, with its view of the churchyard and Highgate School. **He rejected a patterned dress** for Mrs Baggett, as the **time taken** to paint it would **increase the cost** of the picture.
- They shown in their Highgate House opposite Highgate Cemetery and School.



Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), *Christ Teaching at Cookham Regatta*, 1954-59, 200.6 x 536 cm, Stanley Spencer Gallery

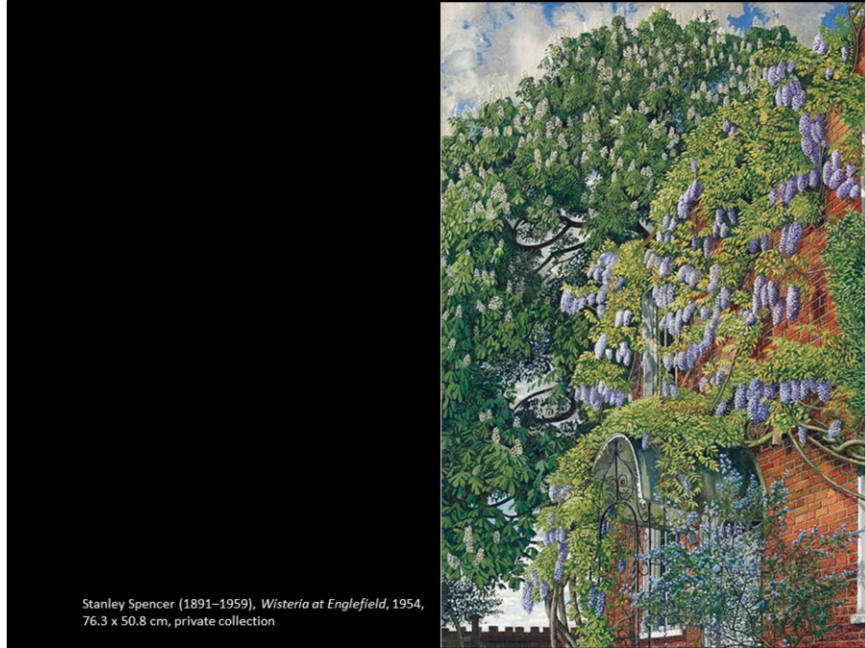
- In **1954** Spencer was part of a **cultural delegation to China** and he told the Chinese "I feel at home in China because I feel that Cookham is somewhere near, only just around the corner."
- Towards the end of 1955, a large **retrospective of Spencer's work** was held at the **Tate** and he began a series of large paintings centred on the work ***Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta***, which were intended for the *Church House*.
- This enormous painting was unfinished at the time of his death and shows how he continued to return to the themes and visions he had as a young man. Cookham is the centre of a religious event that imagines Christ teaching on the banks of the Thames during Cookham's annual regatta in September.



Stanley Spencer, *Magnolias*, 1938, private collection

Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Magnolias*, 1938, private collection

- Spencer did landscape sketches from his early days of childhood tuition with Dorothy Bailey in Cookham.
- In 1948 he recalled that his **rivalry with his brother** Gilbert (who also became an Academician) led to his landscape painting before WWII. As he put it, 'by competitive [sic] copy of brother'. After WWII he reverted to landscape painting as he '**felt crushed by the war**' (what he called 'war depression') and '**by the wonder of my brother's work**'. He also realised 'that [in order] to earn I had to do them [landscapes]'. He also said the in landscape and portraiture '**I had no wish or intention ever to be fully expressive by means of painting an object in front of me**'. He found landscape a chore as he insisted on painting exactly what was before him so if a cornfield was cut he repainted it. Landscapes took him a long time and do not have the freedom of the scenes from his imagination.
- In 1938 he began creating pictures of gardens and landscapes in and around his beloved hometown of Cookham, which he described as '**a village in heaven**'. *Magnolias*, 1938 is one of the resulting pieces, with Spencer so excited about it he wrote to his dealer, Dudley Tooth, that it was '**as good as anything I have done**' before it was even finished.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Wisteria at Englefield*, 1954, 76.3 x 50.8 cm, private collection

- Spencer painted in the **British Pre-Raphaelite tradition**. Not in the minute detail of John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* but with the same **delight in the minute detail** of nature. He loved to paint leaf by leaf and petal by petal as he loved it all too much to leave anything out.
- *Wisteria at Englefield* was painted over a **period of five weeks in 1954** and **commissioned by Gerard Shiel** who **owned Englefield** in Cookham. Shiel became an **enthusiastic supporter** of Spencer and commissioned five works between 1948 and 1955. He was also a **founder and chairman of the Stanley Spencer Gallery**. Whereas a **figure painting** might take **three or four days** and could be produced in the studio from drawings, a **garden subject** could take **four to six weeks** and had to be painted on site with all the problems of weather and fading blooms. Spencer rarely accepted landscape or garden subject commissions. When he did he chose his own subjects, weather conditions and season.
- "Spencer often found the **pressure to produce landscape and flower paintings deeply irritating**. As he complained to his dealer, Dudley Tooth, in May 1933, 'As I

feared, everyone as usual wants my landscapes,' going on to state 'I am very sorry public galleries are taking my landscapes as representative works of mine'. Certainly, Spencer preferred to direct critics and collectors directly to his imaginative figurative paintings, but the pressure to produce the more popular landscapes increased **during the 1930s**, when he was **deep in debt** and Tooth was urging him to **produce as many 'easy sellers' (landscapes) as possible to pay the bills.**" (Christie's)

Notes

- Christie's sale estimate £500,000-800,000, sold for £962,500 June 2015

References

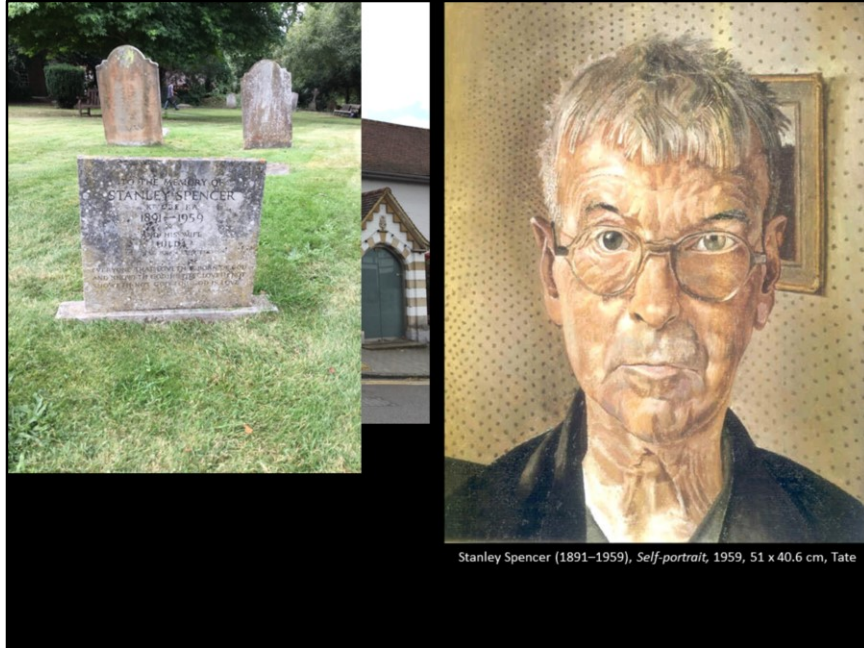
<http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/sir-stanley-spencer-ra-wisteria-at-5914839-details.aspx>



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Lilac and Clematis at Englefield*, 1954, 51 x 76 cm,
Stanley Spencer Gallery

Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Lilac and Clematis at Englefield*, 1954, 51 x 76 cm,
Stanley Spencer Gallery

- Another of the **commissions from Gerard Shiel**. The others were *Cookham from Englefield*, 1948; *Englefield Garden looking towards Hedsor*, 1950; *Englefield House, Cookham*, 1951. Shiel had taken a **lease on Englefield**, Cookham, in 1939 and settled there permanently after the war.
- By the mid-50s Spencer once again felt that **Cookham was full of special meaning** that made everything holy. A feeling that he had first had before the First World War and which had been dulled by the trauma of the war.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Self-portrait*, 1959, 51 x 40.6 cm, Tate

- This is Spencer's final self-portrait produced 45 years after his first. He painted it while staying with friends in Yorkshire five months before he died of cancer. He painted it in just five days again in a bedroom.
- **Spencer's last words** – written, since he was unable to speak – were '**sorrow and sadness is not for me**'.

Notes

- In his later years Spencer was seen as a "small man with twinkling eyes and shaggy grey hair, often wearing his pyjamas under his suit if it was cold." Spencer became a "familiar sight, wandering the lanes of Cookham pushing the old pram in which he carried his canvas and easel."
- In 1958 Spencer painted *The Crucifixion* which was set in Cookham High Street and first displayed in Cookham Church.
- In December 1958 Spencer was **diagnosed with cancer**. He underwent an operation at the Canadian War Memorial Hospital on the Cliveden estate in 1959. After his operation, he went to stay with friends in Dewsbury. There, over **five days** from July 12 to July 16 he painted a **final self-portrait**. *Self-Portrait* (1959) shows a

fierce, almost defiant individual. Lord Astor made arrangements so that Spencer could move into his childhood home, Fernlea, and he died of cancer at nearby Cliveden in December that year. At the time of his death *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta* remained unfinished at his home. Spencer was cremated and his ashes laid in Cookham Churchyard.

- Spencer was poor for most of his life by the prices paid for his work soared after a retrospective at the Royal Academy in 1980. *The Resurrection; Waking Up* fetched £770,000 at Christie's early in 1990, and in May of that year his *Crucifixion* (1958) fetched £1,320,000. "It was an all-time record for a modern British painting, and would have astounded Stanley, who was poor for so long." By 2011, *Sunflower and Dog Worship* sold for **£5.4m**, beating a record of £4.7m set a few minutes earlier for *Workmen in the House*. In 2013 Christie's sold Spencer's *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta: Conversation Between Punts*, 1955, for £6 million, the world record for the artist at auction.
- In 1973 the Tate acquired a large proportion of the Spencer family archives. These included Stanley Spencer's notebooks, sketchbooks and correspondence including the weekly letters he wrote to his sister Florence during World War I.
- His tombstone in Holy Trinity Church, Cookham is dedicated to Spencer and his first wife Hilda Carline. The inscription reads, "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." 1 John 4:7-8 King James Bible.
- The **Stanley Spencer Gallery** in Cookham is dedicated to his life and works. He called Cookham 'a Village in Heaven' and it was an endless source of artistic inspiration throughout his life. The building was **originally the Wesleyan Chapel** built in 1846. It was **attended by Spencer** but with the opening of a larger Methodist Chapel it **closed in 1910**. In 2006/7 the building was completely refurbished at a cost of over £800,000 thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund.



NEXT WEEK:
DADA,
SURREALISM
& EXPRESSIONISM

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