

Newsletter

Winter 2020

Friends of the **Stanley Spencer Gallery**

President: Dr James Fox

Vice-president: Miss Shirin Spencer

An organisation within the Stanley Spencer Memorial Fund, registered charity no 307989

Patron: Lord Richard Harries of Pentregarth, formerly Bishop of Oxford

Digital presence helps to keep Gallery in public eye

We are pleased to say that the Stanley Spencer Gallery reopened on 3 December and we are now back to our usual winter schedule (*see below*).

Widespread media coverage of our *Love, Art, Loss* exhibition helped the Gallery's visitor numbers to surpass our previous levels over the summer, and we have had many appreciative comments.

However, faced with two lockdown periods since March, we have had to move to a more digital world to maintain interest in Stanley's art and the Gallery.

Over the last few months, we have increased our following and we are now touching 3,000 followers across Twitter and Instagram. They are based around the world, especially in Australia! While that may not seem a lot compared with mega pop stars, we have a very loyal following who are engaged with our posts.

A highlight this year has been our 'digital walk' around Cookham showing Stanley's paintings and then a photo of the same place today. It even caught the attention of local Lorraine Kelly who mentioned it on her show. The 'spike' of interest pushed the tweet to over 10,000 viewers, who in turn were directed to our website for a fuller experience.

Whilst its power is difficult to judge, it did feel good that due to a curator at the Royal Academy commenting on *Christ Preaching at Cookham*



Regatta as a favourite painting, the RA chose to re-tweet it to their 400,000 followers.

As already mentioned, our website plays a key role in our digital presence. It is the 'shop window' for the Gallery, and helps us to expand any tweet to show more about the paintings. An example of this was during Easter week this year, when we told the Easter story each day with a painting of Stanley's. We are currently featuring the stories behind the pictures on some of our Christmas cards.

The website also allows us to continue to sell our merchandise when the Gallery is closed, so if you need any cards, prints or books, please check them out under the heading 'Shop' on www.stanleyspencer.org.uk

Roger Kirby

Winter opening hours: Thurs – Sun, 11am – 4.30pm. Open New Year's Day. Also open Mon 28 – Wed 30 Dec. Closed Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

A tribute to Dick Hurley, 1926 - 2020

Dick was involved with the Stanley Spencer Gallery for a period of some 22 years, retiring in 2008 after more than a decade as Chair of Trustees. He played a leading role in lifting the organisation from a somewhat modest affair to becoming one of the most popular and admired visitor attractions in the area.

His 22 years in a leading role ensured that the Gallery moved from strength to strength as the beating heart of Spencer's 'Village in Heaven'. This is a legacy which in his retirement he was entitled to take great pride.

Perhaps his major achievement was the Gallery refurbishment project (2006–7), when with substantial help from the Heritage Lottery Fund and others the Gallery was converted from a seriously ageing building into a vibrant and modern exhibition space which Spencer himself would have delighted in. Dick's attention to detail, excellent technical, practical, and teamwork skills, as well as enormous integrity, ensured that the project was a great success.



Dick Hurley (far left) and Stuart Conlin (second left) receiving a Design Award for the Gallery refurbishment

Quite aside from his Gallery responsibilities, Dick was a very caring husband, father, grandfather, and great grandfather. I am sure that his success was in no small part due to the support of his family. Molly was always by his side at Gallery activities, as well as making her own valuable contributions with talks, walks, beautiful flower arrangements and delicious Christmas lunches for all the volunteers. All of this contributed in a large part to making the Gallery a very happy place to work under Dick's leadership.

All of those who had the privilege of working with him will miss him as a colleague and a friend.

Stuart Conlin

Annual General Meeting 2021



James Fox

Next year's AGM will take place on **Friday 26 March** at Moor Hall in Cookham.

We are fortunate to have as guest speaker our President, **Dr James Fox**, who will be familiar to many of you

from his previous talks in Cookham, as well as a memorable Friends' outing to Cambridge in 2017.

The talk will begin at 8pm. Coffee and tea will be served from 7.30pm. There is no charge; all Friends of the Gallery are invited to attend, and you are welcome to bring guests along too.

Please note that, if coronavirus restrictions are still in place in March 2021, the annual meeting will be held on Zoom. Further information will be available closer to the date.

The Chair of Trustees

In the fourth of a series about the people who help to run the Gallery, Dick Brealey talks to Scot McKendrick, Chair of Trustees.

Scot, how did you first become involved in the Gallery?

Well, my full-time job is with the British Library. In 2003–4 the British Library joined together with the Royal Academy of Arts and the J. Paul Getty Museum to sponsor a major exhibition, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, which I curated. This led Dick Hurley to hear that I had exhibition experience and to invite me to become a trustee. Then, when Stuart Conlin resigned in 2017, I was asked to become chairman. *I think of the trustees as performing a similar role to that of a company board, in other words providing oversight and setting long-term strategy. So what are the longer term strategic issues that you think need to be addressed?*

First, we have taken some advice recently on some structural and governance issues. These are not matters that grab the imagination, but they could be important.

Could you give me an example?

For instance, it has been suggested to us that the Gallery could be better protected if we became an incorporated rather than an unincorporated charitable trust. It is an idea that we need to consider, especially in relation to our critical Accreditation with Arts Council England.

Subscription renewals

Another year has gone by, and Friends' memberships which expire on 31 December 2020 are up for renewal. We will contact you individually (by post or email) in the next few weeks to invite you to rejoin.

Membership fees remain unchanged: the cost for two years is £15 single and £30 for a couple; for five years, it is £30 single and £50 for a couple.

What are some of the other strategic issues that the trustees are thinking about?

Our basic function as a charity is to provide a public benefit and we therefore need to understand our visitors better and the contribution that we can offer.



Scot McKendrick

We know, for example, that about 60% of our visitors are seniors and that raises the question as to how we could appeal more to future generations, and what we can do to attract a broader range of visitors, including more from special groups, and educational institutions.

Currently 80% of our admissions typically are for the summer exhibition. Does this concern you?

Very much. For example, it makes us very financially dependent on the success of our summer exhibition. So making our winter exhibitions more attractive is very important.

It has been in many ways a difficult year for the Gallery. How have we come through it?

We are obviously going to make a loss for the year, but, because everybody in the Gallery is a volunteer, we are in a much better position than most galleries. The new exhibition has been getting some very good reviews and is proving popular. Of course, the best item of news for the year was the acquisition of the self-portrait that Spencer drew just before his death.

We were very fortunate to get so much help from the Art Fund with this purchase.

Yes, and it is very important also that we got the help of the Friends. It would not have been easy to get funding from the Art Fund if we had not been able to point to the financial support of the Friends.

That's good to know. I hope that there will be plenty more occasions that we can make a difference.

Remembrance service at Sandham Memorial Chapel

The last few months have continued to be a quiet time for the team at Sandham as the chapel remains closed. We have enjoyed seeing the garden resplendent in autumn colour as we look forward to welcoming visitors back in the spring of next year.

Over the summer, our friends at the Salonika Campaign Society got in touch about their annual Remembrance Service – each year they lay wreaths at the Cenotaph to honour those who gave their lives during the campaign. In light of the pandemic, they were keen to make alternative plans for 2020 and hoped to lay wreaths in the orchard at Sandham – at one of the two oak trees which were donated to the chapel in 1960 by the Berkshire Branch of the Salonika Reunion Association, in memory of Stanley Spencer.

Rev. Mark Christian (one of the Sandham volunteer team, a former Grenadier Guards Chaplain and a member of the Salonika Campaign Society) had agreed to lead the service and our plans had just been finalised when the latest lockdown was announced. Rather than cancel plans completely, Mark came up with the idea of making a short film of the Service of Remembrance at Sandham, which could be done within the new guidelines.



This film allowed us to share the ceremony, not only with those who were originally due to attend, but with a much wider audience of volunteers, visitors, friends and partners. The ceremony included the laying of a wreath on behalf of the Salonika Campaign Society and the NT Sandham team, in commemoration of those British and Commonwealth personnel who died whilst serving with the British Salonika Force.

The film of our Service of Remembrance has been uploaded to YouTube and is available to view at https://youtu.be/luX_mUbftAI. If you would like a copy of the Order of Service, please get in touch by email (paul.grist@nationaltrust.org.uk) and I will be delighted to send you a pdf.

Keep safe and well; we look forward to welcoming visitors back to Sandham very soon.

Paul Grist, Property Operations Manager

Christmas gifts from the Gallery

Friends' membership would make an inspired gift for art-loving friends and family. The Gallery also has a wonderful selection of books, prints and Christmas cards. All these are available to purchase in the Gallery or via our website: www.stanleyspencer.org.uk

New this year is a colourful card by Claires Court pupil Ethan Olikara, showing Stanley Spencer pushing his pram around Cookham.

