



WEAVING STORIES

From the curiosity of volunteers at the Gallery has come a wonderful project that studies Stanley's use of textiles to express emotional intimacy, spiritual response and domestic life.

Bringing to life these emotions in the most powerful way known to us yet, a series of eleven films depict the folds of a dress or the texture of a bedspread to reveal deeper truths about love, work and the sacred in Stanley's everyday life.



The Sabbath Breakers 1952

In *The Sabbath Makers*, dotted garments may indicate messengers of god, hard checks as protective chainmail and heavy fabrics of fur and feather as ostentatiously large egos.

For *Fitting Dress on Table* Stanley elevates a luxurious dress onto which lace will be sewn, showing the importance and meaning of that dress. In what can be described as a 'love, loss and what I wore' moment.

A war roughened soldier makes a bed in a room full of lush fabrics and patterned wallpaper. Stanley in *Bed Making* is the soldier who served at Beaufort War Hospital in Bristol where he would have dressed horrendous wounds and cared for the dead and dying. Here he is at home in Cookham, safe and surrounded by family, comfortable.

And in *Hilda Welcomed*, warm colours, patterns and people huddle as the season cools down but the family is reunited.

Symbolism in Fabric & Pattern



Bed Making 1932

These episodes are about five minutes long and on YouTube (click the flowers) as well.

- 1 of 11. The Sabbath Breakers (1952)
- 2 of 11. At the Chest of Drawers (1936)
- 3 of 11. The Bridge (1920)
- 4 of 11. Fitting Dress on Table (Dressmaking) (1926)
- 5 of 11. Hilda Welcomed (1953)
- 6 of 11. Gardening (1945)
- 7 of 11. Dinner on the Hotel Lawn (1957)
- 8 of 11. Portrait of Eric Williams (1954)
- 9 of 11. Bed Making (1932)
- 10 of 11. Portrait of Mr and Mrs Baggett (1956-57)
- 11 of 11. Nude (1936)



Hilda Welcomed 1953



Watch the full Series <https://stanleypencer.org.uk/weaving-stories-test/>

Roger Kirby

TRIP ON ALASKA 30th June

I was trying to think what the collective noun would be for a group of Spencer enthusiasts setting out on a boat on the Thames to celebrate the artist's birthday. The best word I could find was a 'happiness' of Friends. On quite genuinely the hottest day of the year the sparkling Thames was at its best in the late afternoon sunshine. The gentle breeze took the fierce heat out of the sun, and the Pimms soon started to flow as the beautiful steamer 'Alaska' glided under the bridge and made its way upstream.

Built in 1883 at Bourne End the beautifully restored steam ship would have been on the same stretch of the river at the time Spencer set his great work *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta*, the subject of the current exhibition.



Restored steam ship, the Alaska on the River Thames June 30th 2025

On board the two sailings were Friends of the Gallery and guests who had travelled distances to join us. Amy Lim, Curator of the current exhibition spoke about the importance of the river in Spencer's life and work.

We were joined on the second sailing by Spencer's grandson John and his wife Joanne, by Chair of Trustees Scot McKendrick and his wife Alison, and Chris Brown, Chair of the Friends. It was also a pleasure to see David Ricardo able to step aboard – he is a long-time Cookham resident who knew Stanley during his childhood. David's ancestor was Colonel Ricardo – who saved the building which now houses the Gallery from the fate of becoming a fish shop! David has a delightful drawing of himself as a child as a treasured memento of their time together.

It was a memorable evening and all on board could understand it when Stanley recalled jumping into the river when the sunlight shone on the water and said 'it was the time for visitations'. It certainly was – and not just because of the Pimms!

Chrissy Rosenthal

Steaming away appropriately from the Ferry Inn, the setting for *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta*, the Alaska cast off promptly at 5 o'clock and headed upstream. The weather couldn't have been more perfect for a nostalgic trip with the sun glowing in a blue sky and a fair wind blowing across the bow.

Guests aboard toasted Stanley on what would have been his 134th birthday as Amy Lim highlighted some of the locations for his paintings: *View from Cookham Bridge*; *Turk's Boatyard*; *Swan Upping*; *Patricia on Cockmarsh Hill*, and briefly described Stanley's life around the time that they were painted.



Photo by David Pinniger

All sorts of craft were enjoying the river and the captain of the Alaska tugged on the rope to activate the horn on several occasions. We turned at the top of a densely wooded island somewhere near Little Marlow and started on our return journey to be back in time for the second trip leaving the Ferry's moorings at 6:30pm. A vote of thanks to Chrissy Rosenthal was endorsed by everyone as she had turned her idea into such a successful event.

Would there have been jam sandwiches for tea (Stanley's favourite)?

Happy Birthday Stanley!



Penny Baron

GATHERING GILBERT

The first complete catalogue of Gilbert Spencer's work, is now live online. Dr Amy Lim and Professor Paul Gough have over 18 months, compiled some 500 canvases, their provenance, exhibition history and literature into this collection. Generously funded by the Arts University Bournemouth and designed by Rich Tarr, it will be useful to art historians, auction houses, dealers, collectors and anyone interested in 20th century British Art.

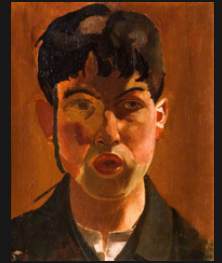
Gilbert Spencer, brother of Stanley, was a leading English landscape painter and educator. His work commented on agriculture, biblical ideology, figures, portraits, still life and war – which form the genres under which his work is catalogued. Please get in touch if you have any new information or images so that the catalogue can be continually updated. It is a free resource and we would like it to reach as many people as possible, so do spread the word.

Paul Gough has also written **Gilbert Spencer, The Life and Works of a Very English Artist**, published by Yale University Press in 2024. The book has been longlisted for the Berger Prize 2025 by The Walpole Society.



An Artist's Progress 1959. Mural in oil at the Royal Academy

Access the catalogue



www.gilbertspencercatalogue.org

In 1958, Gilbert was invited to paint a mural for the Royal Academy's restaurant by its President Sir Charles Wheeler. *An Artist's Progress* tells the story of Gilbert from his childhood in Cookham progressing to the Slade School of Art and finally to his election to the Royal Academy.

When exhibited at the summer exhibition a year later, one critic called it 'The Worst Picture of the Year' while another said 'If anything was calculated to warn youngsters against a career in art, this should surely achieve it.' But this mural can still be seen at the Grand Cafe of the Royal Academy reflecting the Academy's role in fostering artistic development. Barry Fantoni who was an illustrator for Private Eye Magazine said that Gilbert 'was more eccentric than his more famous brother, Stanley, although on the surface he appeared more normal.'



SUMMER STROLLS

Monday 8th September

Stanley's Village in Heaven

From the Gallery at 10.00am

4.1 miles, taking approximately 2.5 hours.

Cookham's countryside locations for Stanley's paintings.



Cookham Rise 1938

Leamington Spa Gallery & Museum

Monday 29th September

Around the Village

From the Gallery at 10:30am. Stanley's life around the village.

Both walks are led by Ann Danks. Please book in advance. £11.55 includes the booking fee.



Stanley & Gilbert in Cookham

ART IN ANCIENT COOKHAM

Next to the Holy Trinity Churchyard where Stanley painted *The Resurrection*, archaeologists are revealing stories from even further back.



Roman Samian Ware from Gaul

If you want to explore art and archaeology, at Cookham Abbey, where an early medieval (700 AD) sacred house is being excavated, you'll find artist Phyllida Shelley on site this summer from the 15th of July till the 9th of August. In the artist's tent you may make your own art whilst history's layers are revealed.

At the dig, they have found Roman pottery from Gaul in France made in 1st, 2nd and 3rd centuries; runes on a lead label; bronze and silver pins that were used to fasten clothes and coins minted with the head of an infamous Anglo Saxon Queen.



Bronze & Silver clothespins

In the 8th Century, Queen Cynethryth ruled the lands of Mercia alongside her husband King Offa. Renowned and respected as an intelligent politician, she signed laws and agreements in her own name, which was highly unusual for women of her time.

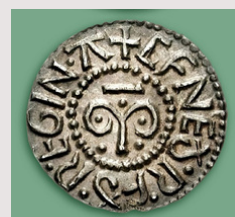
But these were ruthless and conniving times when

superstition and rumour determined the fates of many. Where wicked stepmother's poisoned apples and where saints were made of innocent victims.

King Offa was ambitious and had many rivals killed to make way for his son Ecgrith. In one story, King Æthelbert a monastic scholar looking for an heir is killed whilst he is a guest and potential suitor for King Offa and Queen Cynethryth's daughter Ælfthryth. Cynethryth seems to be against this match and supposedly poisons Offa's mind by suggesting Æthelbert has his sights on Mercia.

Æthelbert is murdered in his bedchamber and becomes a saint. Ecgrith dies only a few weeks after ascending the throne.

Later accounts tell of King Offa's remorse before his death, where he funds a church in St Albans. Queen Cynethryth becomes the Abbess at Cookham which was given to her in personal ownership by Offa, whilst he was alive.



Queen Cynethryth is the only Anglo-Saxon Queen to have minted her own coins.

Since 2021, Professor Gabor of the University of Reading has been heading the excavation of this holy site. This summer they will be digging where the monastic brethren ate and slept, and the cemetery from which they hope to glean the food, ailments and care that people got here.

A series of workshops in the art tent suitable for adults and young people aged 12+ of all abilities can be booked via

www.cookhamabbey.org.uk/events

The Resurrection not in Jerusalem but in Cookham painted by Stanley Spencer 1924 - 7, held at the Tate.

Stanley referred to Cookham as his heaven and saw the spiritual in everything including emotional intimacy and domesticity.

