



## Summer Exhibition 4<sup>th</sup> April - 1<sup>st</sup> November



*Sothwold, 1937 is on loan from Aberdeen Art Gallery*

Following a marvellous run at Gainsborough House, where **Love & Landscape, Stanley Spencer in Suffolk**, drew admiration from various sectors of the art world, the exhibition continues now at the Gallery.

Stanley spent a significant amount of time in Suffolk with his wife Hilda in the early 1920s. The couple got married and spent their honeymoon painting there, in February of 1925.

## Keeping Pace with New Technology

The Gallery may be entirely run by volunteers but it is no laggard in terms of adopting new technology to improve its visitor offer and operation.

Six different tech systems have been introduced over the past year that include:

- A Donations terminal that has encouraged substantial additional income
- Friends database that makes administration very much easier
- Online ticketing, Gift Aid and Electronic Point of Sale (EPoS) system
- Collections Management System
- Volunteer Custodian rota scheduling
- Bloomberg Connects to give visitors additional information

Some 35 different online accounts are managed by over 20 volunteers and we can be truly proud that the Gallery is as professionally run as it is.

**Chris Brown, Trustee**

## Special Deal for Cookham Festival May 2<sup>nd</sup> to May 17<sup>th</sup>

If you're attending the Odney Sculpture Garden keep your ticket as that will get you into the Gallery for **£5** during the Cookham Festival which runs until the 17<sup>th</sup> of May.

The Gallery will be open as usual from 10:30am to 4:30pm, last entry at 4:00pm.



## Behind the Scenes: Digitisation and Discovery

The Gallery has entered a new phase in how it manages its artworks. Information once held across a series of increasingly unwieldy spreadsheets, often difficult to navigate, is now being brought together in a new cloud-based collections management system.

Part of the process involved applying for a grant from the **Julia Rausing Trust** so that the whole collection's condition could be reviewed and photographed.

I have taken on the role of Assistant Registrar, working closely with our Registrar, Clare Mitchell, whose work often takes her abroad, and with Andy de Mille, who has guided us through the grant process.

Together, we are building something transformative. The data we can now store and access for each artwork includes measurements, date of accession, whether it is a loan or part of our permanent collection, titles and sometimes 'alternative' titles, dates of exhibitions, condition reports, images and much more.

Once the core data has been uploaded we will be able to add more information about particular paintings, gleaned from the resources and experts we have in the Gallery, as well as some archival material.

I have lived in Cookham for 44 years. Since joining the band of custodians at the Gallery about four years ago, I have enjoyed learning more about Stanley Spencer and his work. Visitors to the Gallery, fellow volunteers and working with the collections for this management project have offered yet more opportunities to delve into Spencer's art.



**Janet Pullen, Registry**



## Remembering Lord Harries of Pentregarth 1936–2026



*Richard Douglas Harries*

The world lost the Baron Harries Of Pentregarth on 29 April 2026.

He was a valued and longstanding supporter of the Gallery, and someone whose understanding of the relationship between art and faith brought depth to the work of Stanley Spencer.

During his time as Bishop of Oxford, and afterwards, Lord Harries maintained a close interest in the Gallery and its collection which he visited on several occasions.

Harries believed that art could express spiritual dimensions that words alone could not convey. This shaped his writing and speaking, most clearly seen in his book ***The Image of Christ in Modern Art 2013***. In it, he explores how modern artists have approached the figure of Christ in ways that are often intimate, questioning, and rooted in everyday life.

It was this sensitivity to the meeting point between the sacred and the ordinary that drew him to Spencer's work. Harries recognised in Spencer an artist who did not separate the divine from the familiar. Spencer imagined Cookham as a "village in heaven". Harries helped to open up these ideas through his lectures for a wide audience, offering ways of seeing paintings that place the extraordinary within recognisable surroundings.

For the Gallery, his support was both intellectual and personal. He was not only an interpreter of Spencer's work, but an advocate for its continued relevance - someone who understood that these paintings still have the power to speak, challenge, and resonate, especially here in Cookham, the place that inspired them.



## Stanley Spencer's influence on Beryl Cook

**Pride and Joy is at the Box in Plymouth until 31st May 2026.**

At the exhibition which is showing the works of Beryl Cook is also Stanley Spencer's *Marriage at Cana (1953) Bride and Bridegroom*, on loan from the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery. This is in the section exploring Cook's influences.

Beryl Cook born in Surrey in 1925, was self taught and hugely popular in her lifetime "here a moment of gentle awkwardness shares an affinity with the compassionate humour that made Cook famous", is what the Box's exhibition has to say of her. But art establishments dismissed her as kitsch, bawdy and vulgar. However, recently the media have described her work, such as the painting in the back room of the gay bar - Lockyer Tavern, as progressive.



*Marriage at Cana, Bride & Bridegroom*  
Stanley Spencer 1953



*Lockyer Tavern, 1976*

Bringing together well known paintings alongside lesser seen works and archival material, the exhibition at the Box in Plymouth this May offers fresh insights into Beryl Cook's distinctive vision of everyday life which has been described as body positive, inclusive and full of joy.

Cook's connection to the Stanley Spencer Gallery is not only artistic but tangible too.

She made a donation towards the Lottery funded development of the Gallery's mezzanine, reflecting her ongoing commitment to making Spencer's legacy accessible to a wider public.

**The exhibition, at the centenary of her birth, affirms Beryl Cook's enduring appeal and invites conversations that consider the continuities between her vision and that of Stanley Spencer.**



*Bar and Barbara, 1986*

## Letters to a Friend

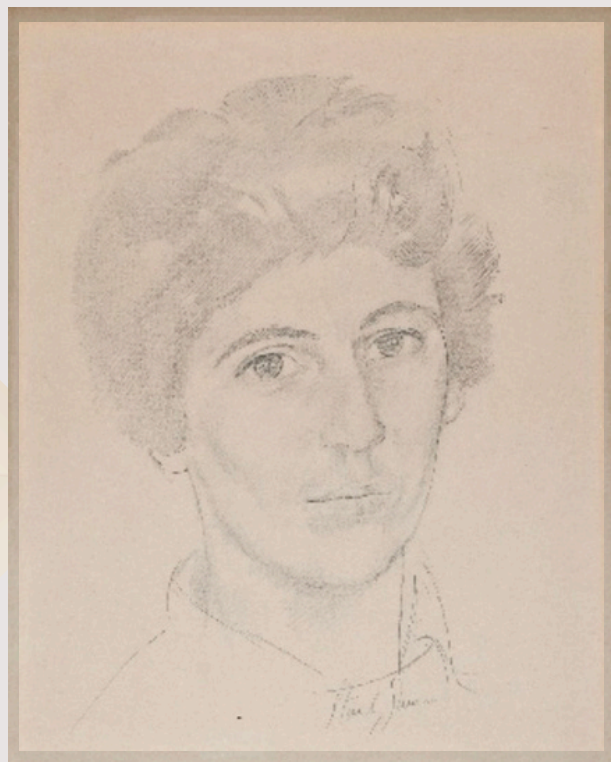
In the Gallery collection is a pencil portrait of Joan George who became a friend of Stanley Spencer's in the late 1950s.

They met through Joan's mother and her interest in the artist led Joan to write an article, **Stanley Spencer, Painter and Visionary, in the Yorkshire Post Nov 7th 1955**. Whilst rigorous and demanding of Joan's writing and understanding during her research Stanley was pleased with the results, saying **'I thought your article in the Yorkshire Post in many ways was the best that appeared on me. I must get on with my work and stop wallowing in the fun'**.

This in many ways set the tone for their further correspondence, which is very revealing of the artist's pattern of work and social activities for the rest of the decade. Although Joan's letters no longer exist, Stanley's letters to her were often in reply to an invitation to tea or an evening soiree. He was very keen to tell her what he had been up to; **'Did you see me with Richard Dimbleby.....I don't know if I told you that at the huge Arts Council party I was presented to the Queen Mother?'**

One day in May 1957 he invited Joan to his house Cliveden View for a particular reason; **'No one ever seems to want to look at my drawings & I love to conduct people on a grand tour of them'**. Spencer's practice of drawing ran alongside his more high profile painting work and visitors to his home would even at times be invited to choose a drawing to keep from a vast pile in his bedroom studio. He was spending much time drawing 'heads', sometimes for the sheer joy of it but also to fulfil commissions.

In Dec 1958 he tells of making pencil portraits of the Principal of Brasenose College and Harold MacMillan **'was to have done Eden too but he escaped to Mexico just in time'**. An attempt to draw Crystal MacMillan did not work out well, which Spencer described as **'most crushing'**.



Joan George, Stanley Spencer 1958

He was much in demand by parents who wanted a keepsake of their children (he had indeed drawn Joan's daughter Clare a few times), a source of ready income if an unwelcome distraction from his painting; **'... every time I go to Church someone hastens up the church path as I leave and nabs me to do a drawing of mine of their children. Thirty pounds for one attendance at Church'**.

After one particularly manic letter outlining all the dates that he was busy, Spencer said to Joan **'I really need a secretary'**. She did not offer to fill that position but in the years after the artist's death Joan's considerable organisational skills came to the fore and she was one of the prime movers in the founding of the Stanley Spencer Gallery.

Joan passed away in Dec 2025 at the grand age of 103.

The material mentioned here can be found on the archive shelves on the mezzanine floor of the Gallery: Yorkshire Post article in File 0 L3, copies of the letters in 'Letters, Jottings and Notes'. Joan's story, told in her own words, is on the Library shelf in her book: **Stanley Spencer Remembered** which is also available to purchase in the shop.

Ann Danks, Archives