



WHAT A DREAM - WINTER EXHIBITION 6th November 2026 -21st March 2027



Stanley Spencer Tribute 2021

Bunt's Bricks, Braces and Bert

Gary Bunt whose work will be showing in our winter exhibition alongside Stanley Spencer's was most famous for creating Bert. Bert, is the old man in his paintings modelled on his father, accompanied by his dog and a poem.



*Be grateful every day
That you have a place to call your home
Be grateful if you have a dish
Full of biscuits and a bone*

Stanley Spencer's work influenced Gary Bunt so much that Bunt included Spencer's work into his series of paintings as a tribute to Stanley Spencer in 2021. Some of the works that will be showing this winter were created especially for this exhibition.

Gary Bunt's Genesis inspired suite reimagining the Creation story with Bert standing in for Christ, was consciously following Spencer's own practice of relocating biblical scenes into ordinary English life like the resurrections and sermons in the streets and regattas of Cookham.

Bunt's path to painting began with decorating pub signs to buy paintbrushes and then selling watercolours "for beer money."

He was born in East Peckham in 1957 and went on to work with his father and seven uncles in the building trade. Where during lunch hours whilst his workmates were flicking through the tabloids, he read Thomas Hardy and Virginia Woolf.

His father could be Bert, the burly man wearing braces. He was a founding abandoned as an infant on the steps of London's Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital. In Gary Bunt's studio Bert's old wellington boots turned down due to his chubby legs were used as brush holders. Later, Bunt said of Bert - "I painted myself as an old man because I didn't think I'd survive till old age."

As a boy Gary Bunt had taught himself to play the guitar on a cardboard cutout strung with wool unpicked from his grandmother's knitting.

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Later, Bunt played guitar in a band until he met his wife Lynn, after which he gave up the wayward musicians life and took up spirituality and painting in earnest.

In 2001, Gary Bunt was diagnosed with vocal cord cancer, and it was during this time that the now signature short poems, began appearing on the backs of his canvases, evolving from private mementoes into a permanent feature of his work. He also kept a small private chapel, where he liked to sit and, "feel God."

Gary Bunt died in July 2025. He has been described as unpretentious, finding beauty in the ordinary and simple things that matter - faith, companionship and love.



Bunt in his Studio Source Jama Rattigan



Fish and Chips for Two. September 2023



*I'm supposed to be on a diet
But it's causing me some strife
So we're having ourselves a cheeky bite
Otherwise I'll get nagged by the wife
Don't get me wrong, we are still going strong
I love the old girl to bits
As a matter of fact, we're a right double act
We go together like fish and chips*

Love & Landscape is showing until November 1st

Suffolk was where Hilda, Stanley's first wife had served as a Land Girl - women replacing the men in agriculture that had gone to fight in the first world war. They ploughed, milked, harvested and laboured on farms in unfamiliar rural settings and physically demanding conditions.



Stanley's emotional connection to Suffolk and Hilda endured for the rest of his life, even after Hilda's death through his letters.

This exhibition brings together major loans from the Tate, Leeds Museum, Hull's Ferens along with rarely seen private loans and personal items never before displayed in Cookham.

In the **Gallery Shop** you'll find a range of gifts and literature. Including the intriguing stories of characters in Stanley's life. Like Nicola Upson's novel which dramatises Elsie Munday, the Spencer's housekeeper as a friend and confidante to both Hilda and Stanley as their marriage grew complex.



The Gallery in the Bloomberg Connects Application

Since April, we have had 539 individuals look at the interactive guide for the Gallery of which 357 were from the UK and 41 from the USA.

The Guide has been translated into Dutch, German, Russian, Spanish, Hungarian, Chinese, Polish, Portuguese and Italian.

The Gallery's most popular works looked at so far have been *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta*, *Sarah Tubb* and *Last Supper*. The favourite audio listened to has been for *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta*, *Ectasy*, *Wesley Chapel* and *Neighbours*.

Bloomberg Connects is a free mobile app featuring guides to thousands of museums, galleries, sculpture parks, gardens and cultural spaces around the world.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF THE COLLECTION

The Stanley Spencer Gallery has now completed an important project that will strengthen the care and management of its nationally significant repository.

The project has included photographing the entire collection, to create digital images of works on long term loan, and a significant number of items in the archive. Although largely behind the scenes, the new collections management system will have a lasting impact on how the Gallery cares for its collections. It provides a more robust and efficient way to record information about artworks and objects, helping staff and volunteers to manage conservation, exhibitions, loans and research more effectively.

For visitors, this means better access to accurate and up-to-date information about the collection, helping us to share more of Stanley Spencer's remarkable story through exhibitions, learning activities and future digital resources. By improving the way we manage our collections today, we are helping to ensure they can be enjoyed by future generations.

The project was made possible through an **AIM Museum Fundamentals Grant**, funded by the **Pilgrim Trust** and the **Julia Rausing Trust**.



We are grateful to the Association of Independent Museums, the Pilgrim Trust and the Julia Rausing Trust for supporting this investment in the long-term care and accessibility of the Stanley Spencer Collection.

VISIT COOKHAM

The **Cookham Abbey Dig** continues where they keep finding objects that bring the medieval Anglo Saxon kingdom of Mercia alive. Imagine amber light coming in through a smoke hole catching the dust that hangs over a loom. A young oblate – child offered by their family to be raised and educated in a monastery possibly destined to be a nun or a monk, has hands, red from carding – detangling and combing fibres with two spiked boards. After which the fibres would have been spun on a spindle and whorl to twist them into continuous yarn.

The girl now fourteen years old, stands whilst the loom leans against a wattle and daub panelled wall. The warp threads hang down vertically, kept taught with clay weights whilst she passes the weft, horizontally. In her hand is a pin beater. She uses it to nudge the weft into place and correct small errors for this cloth will likely become an altar cloth, shroud or traded down the Thames to Wessex.

For more information, visit www.cookhamabbey.org.uk

The workshop at the Abbey is right by the well for washing and dyeing wool. At dusk, the oblate tucks the pin into her sleeve to finish off one little bit of work and goes to collect water before Compline – the last service after Vespers. The bucket's cord slips, she leans to steady it and the pin slips into six feet of water and silt as the bell tolls. It'll be there for 1200 years until an archeologist from Reading University working sixty feet from the Holy Trinity Church lifts it free in August of 2026.



Antler Pin beater found in the well

There are art and pottery workshops inspired by history being held this summer at the site.

GROUP VISITS TO THE GALLERY THIS SUMMER

The Gallery has welcomed several people this summer on visits that are open to all and bookable through Eventbrite. Ann Danks has been the wonderfully informative guide.

For the first time this year, we offered a 'family' visit, where families could come together to see the Gallery, do some sketching, and then take the local village walk, taking in all the Stanley Spencer sites. The picture shows some of a family enjoying their time sketching in the Gallery. Previously we took a group on the village walk, again much enjoyed. The other picture shows a stop to enjoy *Christ preaching at Cookham Regatta*.

There is still one more of these walks to come.

On **Monday 7th September is the 'Collectors' walk'**, again led by Ann, exploring the people who were supporters of Stanley Spencer, and the works that they collected.

This will take about **1.5 hours**, starting at **10.00am at the Gallery**. There are still some spaces available, the cost is **£15** plus booking fee, and you can **book through Eventbrite using the QR code:**



UNDERSTANDING STANLEY'S 'HEAVEN ON EARTH'

There was a strong turnout of gallery volunteers at the Ashmolean Museum to hear Peter Vass, a lecturer at Oxford Brookes University, address the subject *Shaped by Nature* - Stanley Spencer's Garden Paintings and the Cultivating of Celebrity. Rightly so. This was an excellent overview of Spencer's motivations and influences (political, artistic and domestic) which drew on pictures from Carlisle to Cambridge and private collections including one owned by Barclays plc.

To the end, Stanley Spencer remained mystified that gardens and landscapes (his 'potboilers') sold so much better than his figurative and imaginative works. However, supporting his family and marital issues put so much pressure on his finances that his agent Dudley Took (and later local sponsors) kept him returning to his commercially successful nature and garden subjects. Some were well tended gardens, particularly in the 1930s, whilst others, especially in the 1950s, were wilder. Even during his major projects (Burghclere in the 1920s and the Glasgow Shipbuilding series in WW2) he took the time to paint gardens.

Peter Vass thinks that John Rothenstein, Stanley's lifelong friend and admirer, came close to explaining the reality, saying:



Peter Vass shares his thoughts with Ann Danks from the Gallery after the lecture

"The landscapes gave him hours of respite from the fearful effort involved in the production of large pictures, packed with incident and deeply felt. They refreshed his vision by constantly renewing his intimate contacts with nature and they charged his fabulous memory."

Diana Cresswell