

Stanley Spencer's Cookham

With **Andrew Clark & Ann Danks**

Sir Stanley Spencer was one of the most important painters of the 20th century. This walk will take you round his home village, a place he regarded as 'heaven on earth'. It also ventures into the surrounding countryside and along the Thames. Why not combine your walk with a visit to the Stanley Spencer Gallery to find out more about this fascinating artist and his work?

DISTANCE: 4.1 miles/6.6km

START: Stanley Spencer Gallery, High St, Cookham SL6 9SJ. Grid ref: SU 897853. The walk can also be started from either Cookham Station, Station Hill, Cookham SL6 9BP or the National Trust car park, The Pound, Cookham Moor SL6 9SB (Charges apply). Grid ref: SU 892853

TERRAIN: An easy stile-free walk along pavements and country paths. One modest climb with a total ascent of 130ft/40m. Several gates

MAPS: OS Explorer 172, Chiltern Society 32

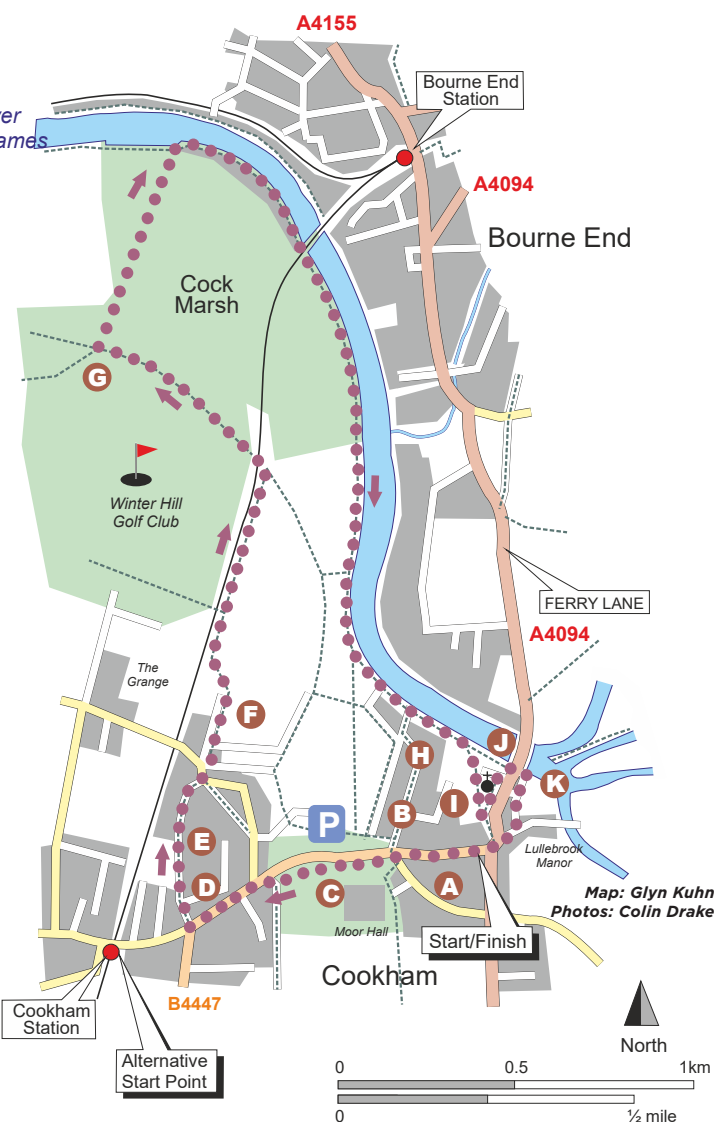
REFRESHMENTS: There are pubs and cafés in Cookham and The Bounty pub, Cock Marsh on the route

LOCAL TRANSPORT: Cookham station is served by the Great Western Railway's Marlow branch line. For bus services please check www.traveline.info.

Background

Cookham: The history of the area predates Roman times. It's thought that a Roman road from Silchester to St Albans crossed the Thames at a nearby bridge. Evidence also suggests there were Anglo-Saxon settlements. In the Middle Ages Cirencester Abbey owned most of the land. Development over subsequent centuries was limited by frequent flooding from the Thames. Expansion did take place over the higher ground around The Pound and accelerated with the arrival of the railway in 1854.

Stanley Spencer was born in Cookham in June 1891 to William Spencer, a church organist and music teacher, and his wife, Annie. He was home educated in a school run by his sisters Annie and Florence. He took art lessons at Maidenhead Technical College before entering the Slade School of Fine Art in London. At the outbreak of WWI he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), and his experiences had a lifelong effect on his



work. After the war he was commissioned to paint an epic series of large-scale murals at the Sandham Memorial Chapel at Burghclere, but much of his art, including his religious works, featured the village life of Cookham. During WWII he was commissioned to paint scenes of shipbuilding near Glasgow. He was married twice, to Hilda Carline and later Patricia Preece, but his private life was very complicated. In 1959 he received a knighthood at Buckingham Palace. He died on 14 December the same year.

Stanley Spencer Gallery: Established in 1962, it's home to the world's largest collection of his works, and has an archive of letters, photographs, press cuttings and books. The building is a former Wesleyan Chapel built in 1846. Spencer attended the chapel with his mother, whose brother had been a local preacher there. In 2007 the Gallery was reopened, after renovation which created a modern, light space that displays Spencer's works to their best advantage.

Route & points of interest

From the Gallery, walk along the High Street past The Kings Arms to a house called Fernlea.

A. Fernlea: Spencer's birthplace. Folklore says that at the time of his birth a crow fell down the chimney, flapped around and flew out the window. The house featured in a number of paintings including 'Neighbours - 1936' and 'Christ Carrying the Cross - 1920'.

Continue along the High Street as far as the War Memorial.

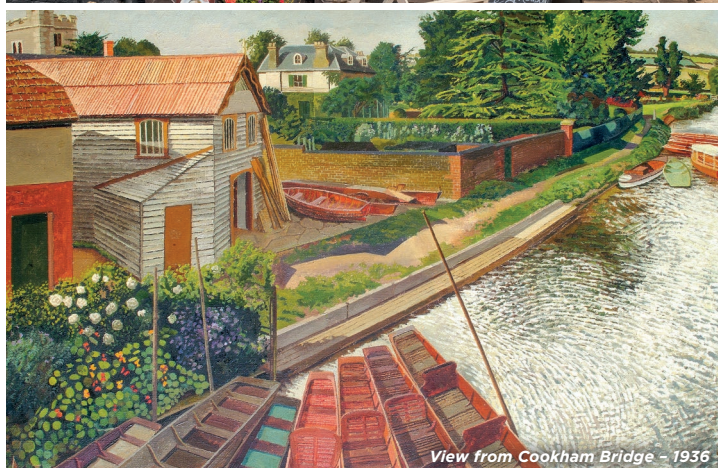
B. The War Memorial carries the name of S Spencer MC. This was Sydney, Spencer's beloved elder brother, who died in the last few weeks of WWI.

Continue in the same direction and cross School Lane to join the surfaced path that runs parallel to the road. This path is known as The Causeway.

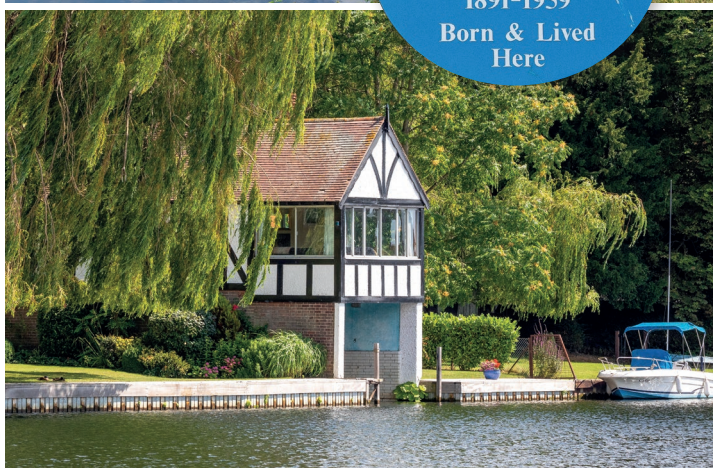
C. The Causeway: Spencer would walk along this path every day on his way to the railway station and his journey to The Slade School of Fine Art in London, the premier art school in the country. He picked up the nickname 'Cookham' because of his love for the village, and his habit of coming home from London every day after classes. This walk is captured in the painting 'Cookham Moor - 1937'.

At the end of The Causeway continue straight ahead, walk past the

Continued overleaf



View from Cookham Bridge - 1936



mini roundabout and take the pedestrian crossing over the road. Turn left along the pavement to Belle Vue Cottages in The Pound.

D. The Pound: The front gardens of these cottages were featured in the painting 'Gardens in the Pound - 1936'.

Walk along for a few metres and turn right into Poundfield Lane. The rough track climbs gently uphill and, just past a field gate, arrives at a large house on the right, Englefield.

E. Englefield was built in the 18th century and is Grade II listed. Many of Spencer's paintings are associated with this property, including 'Cookham from Englefield - 1948' and 'Wisteria at Englefield - 1954'. Continue up Poundfield Lane to a road junction. Turn left and immediately right on a rough track through a car park. Take in the view on the right towards the village, as well as Cliveden and Hedsor in the far distance.

F. The view: Just peeping through the trees on the horizon is the tower at Cliveden. On the hillside to the left is the beautiful hilltop church of St Nicholas, Hedsor. The Spencer family had strong connections to the church - Stanley's father, William, was its choir master and organist. When William was playing a loud piece of music, Stanley and his brother Gilbert would be required to blow the bellows. The view was also the scene for one of Spencer's more notable paintings, 'The Scarecrow - 1934'.

Continue in the same direction. Go through a barrier and along the edge of the golf course. Ignore the path on the left over the railway bridge and stay on the field edge to go down a set of steps to a path junction. Turn left through a gate, go under the railway bridge and bear immediately right through a kissing gate. Walk straight on, go through the next gate and follow the path round the bottom of Cockmarsh Hill. Turn right on a wooden walkway and continue straight ahead across Cock Marsh.

G. Cockmarsh Hill: While crossing the marsh, look back at the hill. Spencer would walk to the top to capture the views. A painting of particular note was one of his second wife: 'Patricia at Cockmarsh Hill - 1935'.

Continue across the marsh and keep to the right of the mound to reach the bank of the Thames. Turn right along it and go through a kissing gate. Stay on the path past The Bounty pub, under the railway line and follow the riverbank for over 1km towards Cookham

Reach Sailing Club. Go through two gates past the Club into Bellrope Meadow.

H. Bellrope Meadow: The name originates from the days when the area was used for the manufacture of rope.

Walk to the end of the meadow and bear right on the surfaced path into the grounds of Holy Trinity Church. Follow the path to the main entrance gate.

I. The church and churchyard: Holy Trinity is a 12th century, Grade II listed church with many later additions. It has some traces of Saxon masonry. In many of his paintings Spencer used both local people and landmarks as the backdrop to religious scenes. This is reflected in one of his most important works, 'The Resurrection, Cookham - 1924-26', in which he used neighbours and family members as models. On the right just past the end of the church is Spencer's memorial headstone, and at the end of the path by the gate is a statue of an angel. This became 'The Angel, Cookham Churchyard - c1936-37'.

At the gate, turn sharp left on an almost hidden path that runs between the boundary wall and the end of the church. Go through a gate and turn right to a gravel driveway. Turn left and take the path between River Gate and Stable Cottage to the riverbank by Ferry Cottage.

J. Cookham Bridge: Spencer spent a lot of time in and around the river, and this was reflected in his paintings, including 'View from Cookham Bridge - 1936'.

Turn right, go under Cookham Bridge and along the wooden walkway at the front of The Ferry pub.

K. The Ferry pub was the scene of Spencer's famous painting 'Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta - 1952-59', unfinished at his death and available to view in the Spencer Gallery.

At the end of the walkway turn right up Ferry Lane to its junction with Odney Lane. Turn right, cross the main road and turn left along the pavement to return to the Gallery and the end of the walk.

Our special thanks go to Ann Danks, Archivist at the Stanley Spencer Gallery, and the late Stephen Palmer, for their support in producing this walk.

Painting: View from Cookham Bridge - 1936. Stanley Spencer Gallery collection. Copyright: Estate of Stanley Spencer.