

## Stanley Spencer: early biography

Spencer was born in Cookham, a quiet, rural village in Berkshire, where he spent most of his life. He would use the village as the focus of many of his paintings.

One of nine children, he had a rich diet of music, literature and religion given to him by his father and older sisters.

His art was heavily influenced by Pre-Raphaelite drawings to begin with (a group of artists who drew images as realistic people). He was also inspired by his biblical upbringing.

By 1911, Spencer had been introduced to paintings by Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gaugin, and soon some of his art was included in a Post-Impressionist art exhibition created by Roger Fry.

Spencer began his painting *Swan Upping* after an experience in church. He wanted to take the 'in-church' feeling outside, transferring the act of worship to the ritual performed by the swan uppers. He began with the upper half and finished the lower half after the War.

1891

1908

1912

1914

1915

1916-17

Spencer studied at the Slade School of Fine Art upon finishing school, and knew other famous artists like Paul Nash and Christopher Nevinson.

He was so fond of visiting home while studying that his friends gave him the nickname 'Cookham'.

Leaving the Slade Art School, Spencer made his way back to Cookham, where he established a series of makeshift studios, painting the landscape and various scenes using Cookham as the inspiration.

4 August: outbreak of the First World War.

Spencer joined up to fight in July 1915. He enlisted in the Royal Medical Corps and was first sent to the Beaufort Military Hospital near Bristol.

In May 1916, Spencer left Beaufort to train at Tweseldown Camp in Hampshire, before volunteering to join an infantry regiment, going to Macedonia in 1917 with the 7th Battalion of the Berkshire Regiment.