GOUGH\_Holy Box\_2017

**Paul Gough** (ed.) *‘The Holy Box’: The Genesis of Stanley Spencer’s Sandham Memorial Chapel* (Sansom and Company in collaboration with The National Trust and the Stanley Spencer Gallery, 2017) 212 pages, 100 illustrations, 25 in colour. ISBN 978-1-911408-09-3.

**Imperatives**

*The Holy Box* continues Gough’s published research into the work of British painter Sir Stanley Spencer who served as an official war artist in both world wars. Gough was given unique access to the archive held by the National Trust of correspondence between the artist, the architect Lionel G Pearson and the patrons Louise and Mary Behrend who provided the funding and guidance for the Sandham Memorial Chapel in Burghclere, Hampshire, which Spencer painted between 1924 and 1932, and reflected his war experiences in Bristol and the Balkans, now Macedonia.

**Process**

The archive of material consisted not only of daily and weekly correspondence between the three main protagonists but also the financial papers, construction history, blueprints and designs related to the vexed history of the design, build and interior decoration. In order to tell the full story of the chapel, now regarded as one of the emblematic painted memorials of the Great War and unique in northern Europe, Gough brought together leading biographers, garden historians, national experts in silversmithing and ecclesiastic decoration to undertake detailed analysis of the social and material culture of the chapel. Each chapter relates an aspect of the chapel’s history and reception.

**Significance**

Gough’s work contributes detailed understanding of the importance of Spencer’s commemorative paintings, based on unique material never before analysed, interpreted and published. Gough was invited to present his research at international conferences in Thessaloniki, Macedonia, May 2018, and Ypres, Belgium in August 2018.

The book was launched in Burghclere at the invitation of the National Trust on the 90th anniversary of the consecration of the chapel in March 2017, in the company of both of Spencer’s daughters, Unity and Shirin, and grandson John Spencer, who now manages the Spencer estate in collaboration with the Stanley Spencer Gallery and the Tate.

Conference details:

The Macedonian Front 1915-1918, Politics, Culture and Society in Time of War, Aristotle University Thessaloniki, Macedonia and The British Embassy, Athens, 11-13 May 2018

‘Best we Forget?’ Some provocations about monument frenzy and recreational grief. ‘The War To end all wars?’, Ypres conference, In Flanders Field Museum, Ypres, Belgium, Keynote speaker, 22-25 August 2018