Preface

'Ties of Friendship'

Breathless, we flung us on the windy hill,
Laughed in the sun, and kissed the lovely grass.
You said, "Through glory and ecstasy we pass;
Wind, sun, and earth remain, the birds sing still,
When we are old, are old..." "And when we die
All's over that is ours; and life burns on
Through other lovers, other lips," said I,
– "Heart of my heart, our heaven is now, is won!"
"We are Earth's best, that learnt her lesson here.
Life is our cry. We have kept the faith!" we said;
"We shall go down with unreluctant tread
Rose-crowned into the darkness!" ...Proud we were,
And laughed, that had such brave true things to say.
– And then you suddenly cried, and turned away.

The Hill', Rupert Brooke

Plenty of artists, it has been observed, 'have tolerably easy, successful lives'. In 1943, however, Randolph Schwabe looked back some forty years to his student days at the Slade School of Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture in London, and reflected that there were many amongst those he had known then who had died 'before the full growth and flowering

that might have been expected from their talents'. It was impossible, he concluded, 'to avoid some insistence of tragedy. Suicide, madness, disease and war exacted a heavy toll on them... Much talent and some genius were born into their generation, and their loss, even for those who were not bound to them by ties of friendship, is deplorable in its tale of waste and unfulfilment.'[1]

What 'change in character', Schwabe wondered, 'might have resulted in the English School' if all those young Slade students had lived out their natural lives?[2] Yet it might also be asked: how was the early twentieth-century English School forged by the very intensity of those events, experiences and personalities? Certainly there were those who were lost too young; but there were also those who – through the stimulation and tribulation of the tremendous events of the years prior to 1919 – rose to greater heights than they might otherwise have achieved. It is, perhaps, the paradox of those times.

The men and women who passed through the doors of the Slade between 1890 and 1910 included such famous (and now not-so-famous) names as Adrian Allinson, Vanessa Bell, David Bomberg, Dorothy Brett, Dora Carrington, John Currie, Mark Gertler, Duncan Grant, Spencer Gore, Gwen and Augustus John, Henry Lamb, Wyndham Lewis, Maxwell Gordon Lightfoot, Ambrose McEvoy, Paul Nash, Richard Nevinson, Ben Nicholson, William Orpen, William Roberts, Isaac Rosenberg, Stanley Spencer and Edward Wadsworth. Together, these men and women helped to make the Slade the foremost art school in England. In the opinion of the critic Frank Rutter, the Slade had eclipsed the Royal Academy in terms of its fertility in producing significant artists.

Whilst the Academy had 'constantly bolstered up the pretensions of British painters', Rutter wrote in 1922, the Slade's professors and pupils 'have always kept their eyes on what was being done at Paris' – and it was Paris more than anywhere else that was at the centre of what was new

and important in Western art in the last few decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth.[3]

The friends and contemporaries of these Slade artists – men and women who helped them to open their eyes to a wider world that transcended the conservativeness of Victorian and Edwardian England – numbered some of the most influential and famous writers, artists and intellectuals of the time. To offer another long list of eminent names, they included Clive Bell, Rupert Brooke, Gilbert Cannan, Jacob Epstein, Roger Fry, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, T.E. Hulme, Aldous Huxley, John Maynard Keynes, D.H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, Edward Marsh, F.T. Marinetti, Lady Ottoline Morrell, John Middleton Murry, Siegfried Sassoon, Lytton Strachey and Leonard and Virginia Woolf. Those of the Slade artists who ventured further afield, to Paris, numbered Picasso, Modigliani and Lenin among their acquaintances.

All these names appear within the pages of this book, and what follows is a part of all their stories. But it is told through the experiences of five of the most closely linked and most successful of these young Slade students: Dora Carrington, Mark Gertler, Paul Nash, Richard Nevinson and Stanley Spencer. All five have been written about before, but perhaps not with such detailed analysis of the most formative years of their lives, or with such close attention to the relationships that acted between them.

As I hope to show, these five – more particularly than any of their other contemporaries – were closely, even intimately, inter-connected. All five were a part of what their Professor of Drawing, the irascible Henry Tonks, later described as the School's second and last 'crisis of brilliance'.[*] Together, they provide a remarkably clear insight into the period, and into the youthful experiences and struggles that help to create an artist – any artist.

* The first had been the earlier generation that included Augustus John, Ambrose McEvoy, William Orpen and Wyndham Lewis.

Between 1910 and 1919 these five, together with their wider circle of contemporaries, loved, talked, and fought; they advised, admired, conspired, and sometimes disparaged each other's artistic ambitions and creations. The Bloomsbury critic and sometime Slade lecturer Roger Fry dubbed them 'les jeunes': they were the Young British Artists of their day. They participated in the newest movements – the Neo-Primitives, the Futurists, the Vorticists, the Bloomsbury Group, the Omega Workshop – and brought havoc with their fights and fanfares in London's Soho and Mayfair. They frequented (and sometimes redecorated) the capital's most stylish cafés and restaurants, and founded their own nightclubs; they led the way in fashion with their avant-garde clothes, haircuts and unconventional, Bohemian lifestyles; they slept with models, with prostitutes, and with each other; on occasion their tempestuous love affairs descended into obsession, murder, and suicide.

This wide circle of artists and writers fought – and some of them died – in the War to end all Wars; or they turned their faces away from that awful carnage, and resisted it in the only way they knew how – with words, and with paint. The Great War is the culmination of this book for, as Paul Nash later reflected, the period after 1914 'was another life, another world'.[4]

But their story starts in quieter times: at Cookham, on the banks of the River Thames.

Chapter 1

Stanley Spencer

The Berkshire village of Cookham lies in a crook of the Thames a few miles upstream from Maidenhead and twenty-five miles west of London. In the last years of Queen Victoria's reign, in winter and spring it was a tranquil place, frequently cut off when the surrounding commons and water meadows flooded. But in summer the river sprang to life, thronging with pleasure seekers in punts, rowing boats, skiffs and paddle steamers. July saw the ancient ceremony of Swan Upping, when the Vintners' and Dyers' Companies claimed ownership of the swans between Blackfriars Bridge and Henley, gathering them in to mark their beaks: once for the Vintners, twice for the Dyers, and those left unmarked for the Queen. And in September there was Cookham Regatta, when the village was decorated with flags, and the trees decked with bunting and Chinese lanterns. Brass bands played, and the river filled with all manner of floating vessels.

It was these pleasures of the Thames that Jerome K. Jerome captured in 1889 in his comic novel, *Three Men in a Boat*:

> We went through Maidenhead quickly, and then eased up, and took leisurely that grand reach beyond Boulter's and Cookham locks. Cliveden Woods still wore their dainty dress of spring, and rose up, from the water's edge, in one long

> harmony of blended shades of fairy green. In its unbroken loveliness this is, perhaps, the sweetest stretch of all the river, and lingeringly we slowly drew our little boat away from its deep peace.[1]

Had Jerome and his friends lingered longer in Cookham, perhaps to gather supplies from the village shop or pause for refreshments at the Old Ship Inn or the Bel and the Dragon Hotel, they would have passed on the High Street two tall, semi-detached Victorian brick villas. Fernlea and Belmont were the homes of two brothers and their families, and had been built by Cookham's master builder – their father, Julius Spencer. In Cookham, everyone knew everyone else, and many local families were related: courtships and romances started as early as the village school, and Julius's grandchildren could claim over seventy relatives in the neighbourhood.

Mirror images of each other, Fernlea and Belmont could be distinguished by the brass plate on the former's front gate: 'W. Spencer: Professor of Piano'. In the year Jerome's novel was published William Spencer was forty-four years old and, as local church organist and resident music teacher, was a familiar sight around the village, out in all weather on his lady's bicycle, music case slung over the handlebars, reciting aloud the works of his adored hero, the art critic and social reformer John Ruskin. William Spencer was an excitable, pious man with a sense of wonder that expressed itself in his fondness for music, poetry and astronomy, and in his intimate observations of nature: 'I crossed London Bridge on Tuesday and could have stood for hours watching the flight of the seagulls – surely the acme of graceful motion', he told one of his sons. 'And yet the people passed by without a glance'.[2]

'Par' Spencer's family was large, talented and musical; his greatest ambition was the success of his eldest son and namesake. A child prodigy, William junior could play preludes and fugues from memory on the family

piano. Even before he could reach the pedals he was performing before the Duke of Westminster at Cliveden, the large country house across the Thames. Guests included the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII), who presented the young virtuoso with a piano of his own. When he grew older Will progressed to the Royal College of Music in London, and gave evening recitals at Maidenhead, the family dressing up to hear him play. The Spencers were doing well: Par travelled regularly to London to serve as organist at St Jude's, Whitechapel, and to give piano lessons to wealthy West Enders. There were concerts, servants and a nurse to look after the five children: what one of them later called 'all the trappings of position'.[3]

Par did everything he could to further his eldest son's musical success. In fact, with overbearing Victorian discipline, he did too much. Long hours of endless practice, together with Par's ban on outdoor sports that might damage his son's precious fingers, combined to undermine Will's health, and he suffered a nervous breakdown. But again, only the best would satisfy Par – Will was sent to Thomas Holloway's 'Sanatorium for Curable Cases of Mental Disease' at Virginia Water. This eventually proved too much for Mrs Spencer, however. Seeing that the hospital was nothing more than 'a club for rich dilettantes with a turn for discussion and a belief that they had been reprieved from facing life outside',[4] she brought Will home to Cookham. Though she had saved her eldest son from a life of idle infirmity, the family's fortunes were already broken. Financially spent, his ambitions shattered, according to his youngest son, Par Spencer 'never quite got over the failure of his highest hopes, and buried himself and his disappointment more and more in his books.'[5]

It was into this 'confusion of ambitions, high endeavour, disappointments and partial recovery' that Mar and Par's last children were delivered.[6] Stanley Spencer was born in Cookham on 30 June 1891 and Gilbert in August the following year. With the money for a nanny eaten away by Will's hospital fees, their teenage sister Annie took

charge of the boys. Theirs would be a simple, unrestricted upbringing, as Gilbert later recalled, and the brothers were preciously close. Stanley later remembered how he once hit his younger brother, 'not very hard', but 'Gil bellowed like a bull & then of course I cried. If Gil cried I cried & if I cried Gil cried. Mar comes rushing into the room, "What is it", "I've hit him I have, I hit him I have, oh Gil", "Oh Stan", "Oh Gil", "Oh Stan".'

And Stanley recalled another time when he and his brother sat in their high chairs: 'we were talking over things in general when Gil says very mysteriously "Stan, what are Angels?", "Ow" says I very knowing and wise "Great big white birds wot pecks". Gil after digesting this peered about for a white bird wot pecks'. His eyes fell on Annie: 'so Gil outs with it "Is she an Angel?", "No" says I very contemptibly "Not great big squashed fat things like her".'[7]

The Spencer family, about 1894: Stanley and Gilbert stand by their mother.

On wet days the boys made their own entertainment indoors: they had only a few toys — an old jigsaw puzzle, a box of buttons, later some wooden bricks. They cut up pieces of paper to make figures to play with, opened with wonder huge old books of wallpaper samples, inhabiting their private imaginative world. Though they preferred to

amuse themselves in the nursery, on fine days their sister took them on meandering walks round the village, which began to fascinate and entrance them. Sneaking into the mysterious garden of some grand old house, climbing trees and 'swinging high into other lands', Gilbert would long after recall how 'the thrill of seeing bits of Cookham cropping up in strange places so unexpectedly never lost its charm for us.'[8]

As they grew older the brothers swam in the river, played football and cricket on the common, or hid unnoticed in dark corners of the village, watching their little world revolve around them. Their love of Cookham and its varied inhabitants meant everything to them – Gilbert swore that the villagers could be distinguished by the different sounds their shoes made on the road.[9] And at the centre of it all was the church, where their brother William performed Bach on the organ – a sound like the joy of angels, said Stanley – and in whose graveyard they played among the tumbling tombstones of Cookham's ancestral dead.[10]

Such was their love of home that a visit to another brother in Maidenhead left them miserable. Gilbert thought this fierce love of Cookham was inherited from their father: 'With so much of his life now in the past, it was all he had to give us, but it was all we needed, or for that matter ever wanted.'[11] When Par made £10 from a published edition of his poems (*Verses, Grave and Gay*), he invested the money in a range of 'Everyman' classics and established a lending library in Fernlea's front room, employing Stan and Gil to paste labels in the books. It was opened to the public with expectant excitement – but nobody came. Such schemes were vivid illustrations of what Gilbert called Par's 'odd excitability and lack of control'.[12] But he galvanised the young boys with his love of existence: 'With him, there could be no excuse for idleness', wrote Gilbert much later. 'Father lived his life whole, and we too if we wished could follow his example out in the "world" – which for us and for him was still Cookham.'[13]

Mar was the rock on which the family stood, 'strong willed and strong minded', taking everything calmly in her stride – but it was Par the boys kissed goodnight.[14] Returning home from London, he brought them presents – one penny 'Books for the Bairns': *Brer Rabbit*, *Snow White*, *Don Quixote*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Pilgrim's Progress*. After Annie had put them to bed she practised her viola in their room whilst downstairs Par continued his piano lessons. Melodies of Handel, Beethoven, Schubert and Mozart floated up through the house, with occasionally an exasperated cry of criticism from Par: 'You play the piano like one of your father's cart horses!'[15]

This lively family life seemed to provide for everything. Meal times were an animated riot of discussion – passionate arguments about poetry, music or football whirling round the dining room. And, under Par's critical eye, everyone played the piano, the focus of family occasions. Another focal point was religion. At first, Mar took her two youngest boys to the Wesleyan chapel – a fervent, emotional experience. Chapel was followed by prayer meetings, which could reach such a zealous pitch that Stanley felt close to breaking down. In a 'wretched, clammy atmosphere', the meetings ended with a man whispering, 'Is there any poor wandering soul here tonight who has not heard the call of Jesus? He is passing by, passing by...'[16]

The feeling that Christ and his disciples wandered the neighbourhood was emphasised by Par's Bible readings. He spoke with such conviction, Stanley later recalled, that it seemed as if the New Testament's miraculous stories had happened in Cookham's familiar streets.[17] Their village became more than simply their home; it was, almost literally, their corner of Heaven.

When the chapel closed and the congregation moved to a new building in more distant Cookham Rise, Mar and the boys started worshipping at the Anglican church by the river. Stanley would later tell his brother that 'through his pictures it was "Cookham Church at one end and Cookham Chapel at the other".'[18] It would be no surprise that religion became the all-encompassing theme of his life and art.

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As Stanley and Gilbert grew older, the thorny question of their education arose. Par could not afford the cost of private school, and Mother held 'snobbish objections' to the local state school, where they would have mixed with the children of their lower-class neighbours. Par found a practical solution by opening his own school in the tin shed down next-door's garden. A few other children from the 'poorer élite' of the village joined them, and for a while Par taught them himself. When this became too much he passed the children's' education on to two sisters in the village. Then, when they emigrated, Annie and another sister, Florence, became their teachers.

Though their education was rudimentary, it left the brothers free to develop much as they pleased. In fact, Gilbert thought it was the making of them. He firmly believed that a proper schooling would have ruined Stanley's emerging imagination, his individuality, and his creative drive.

These were now manifesting themselves in drawing – a talent then largely unfamiliar to the musically orientated Spencer household.* There were almost no art books in the house, and his earliest inspiration were the illustrations in his children's books, particularly those by Arthur Rackham, an artist with a vivid imagination for landscape scenes peopled with diaphanous fairies, luscious nymphs and dreadful monsters. Rackham's illustrations for *Gulliver's Travels*, *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* remain amongst the finest in English children's illustrations. Stanley made copies, and told Gilbert that one day he would like to draw like Rackham.[19]

On their walks around Cookham with Annie, at the fringes of Odney Common or by the moor, the boys sometimes encountered William Bailey,

* Whilst at the Royal College of Music Will had made drawings of the staff and students, which were so well thought of it was suggested to Par that he might do even better as an artist. But nothing ever came of this, and Gilbert wrote that before Stanley there was no strong interest shown in pictures at Fernlea.

a local builder and talented 'Sunday artist' who painted atmospheric oils of local scenes and talked mysteriously about the 'lost-and-foundness of things'.[20] His daughter Dorothy was a painter and designer, and she gave them their first lessons in watercolours in her house across the road from Fernlea, where they saw more of Mr Bailey's Cookham pictures.

William Bailey's love of local scenes left an indelible mark on the young Spencer brothers. Stanley soon discovered that drawing things in Cookham – its buildings, its animals, its people, the river – somehow connected him even more closely to his beloved home. He first experienced this revelation when he discovered a dead thrush in the garden, the bird's body limp but still warm. He spread out its wings and made a drawing. Though it was poorly done, 'I felt a new kind of contact with life had been made: the Thrush had lived in our garden, had been in all sorts of ungetable places in our Pear tree, our Walnut tree, our Yew tree & all the places we weren't allowed to go into next door's gardens. I was drawing something that was to do with all those places.'[21] This memory, as recalled in the 1930s, was of a discovery of enormous impact. It was the realisation that drawing could bring him even deeper into the almost mystical experience of his everyday surroundings. Through drawing, he could capture or recreate the feelings and experiences and emotions of his village life.

And this could be done not only by drawing the things he saw in Cookham, he discovered, but also by the things he imagined might happen there. An early drawing depicted Cookham's Fire Brigade in their helmets and uniforms riding on the backs of snails along the cobbled stones outside the Bel and the Dragon Hotel. Done in black and red ink, Gilbert described it as 'a miracle' – and seriously intended, too. 'Even at this early date, without perhaps being very aware of it, he had, I think, joined issue with his destiny.'[22]

For Gilbert, so aware of the great expectations their father had held for William, it was ironic that in their very midst, unnoticed, another

talent was developing unfettered: 'Will's sacrifice on the altar of my father's Victorian theories and rigid training of the young was not in vain if Stanley's genius was left free.'[23]

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Conscious that he must to do something serious about his youngest sons' education or abandon them to a future of menial labouring jobs, Par finally decided to send Gilbert to a co-educational school in Maidenhead. He was less sure about what to do with Stanley, however, who was developing into a solitary, undersized young teenager prone to long walks, but with a heightening passion for drawing. Par was close friends with a local gentleman, Lord Boston, whose wife had studied at the Slade School of Art in London. Par showed her some of Stanley's drawings, and although Lady Boston was not especially enthusiastic about the boy's work, she invited him to come and draw with her twice a week. As Stanley's work slowly improved, in 1907 she arranged for him to attend the Technical Institute in Maidenhead. Here for the first time he studied under professional guidance, making detailed copies from casts of antique sculpture. Stanley's future was now clear: he would be an artist.

After a year's schooling at Maidenhead Tech, Par considered sending Stanley to the radical new art school at Newlyn in Cornwall, founded by the painter Stanhope Forbes in 1899. Forbes encouraged painting out of doors, and had made his name with scenes from everyday French and English village life. It sounded an ideal place for Stanley. But it would have meant leaving Cookham, and most Spencers suffered excruciating homesickness. So Lady Boston suggested her old school instead: Stanley could catch the 8.50 morning train to London, and by catching the 5.08 from Paddington after lessons he could still be home in time for tea. It sounded perfect. But would the Slade take him?

The Slade School of Art had been founded in 1871 by a series of endowments made by the will of the collector and antiquary Felix Slade.

University College, London, around 1910: the Slade's buildings are just to the left of this picture

As well as establishing Slade Professorships at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, a substantial amount of money was left to found a similar Chair of Fine Arts and six scholarships at University College, London. The new School was situated in the attractive front quadrangle of UCL's neo-classical building on Gower Street, Bloomsbury, about half a mile north of the British Museum. The first two London Slade Professors quickly established a tradition of fine draughtsmanship at the School, demanding that students draw from life models as well as from antique sculpture. The third Slade Professor, appointed in 1893, was Fred Brown, himself a former student of the School. An energetic man who at times happily walked all the way home from Gower Street to his home in Richmond, a student recalled his 'general manner' as 'gruff and, superficially, discouraging'.[24]

As a young painter Brown had kept abreast of artistic developments in France, and was particularly influenced by French Impressionism. In 1886, along with a number of friends who had also studied in Paris, he founded the New English Art Club. Modelled on the Parisian Salon des

Refusés, up to 1914 the NEAC was one of the few institutions for those British artists who wanted to exhibit their work outside the stuffier confines of the Royal Academy. Though by the turn of the century it had established itself as the new orthodoxy, it was here that many of Brown's students would first display their work for public scrutiny.

On his appointment at the Slade Brown had invited one of his pupils, a gifted young doctor and anatomist with a predilection for art named Henry Tonks, to join him as Professor of Drawing. Another friend, the highly talented but painfully taciturn Philip Wilson Steer, he appointed as Professor of Painting. Then in 1895 Walter Russell, another of Brown's former pupils, was appointed Assistant Professor. Together, these four men formed a close-knit company of friends, advocating realism in both drawing and painting. By 1907 a number of important British artists had passed through their tutelage; these talents included Augustus John, William Orpen, Wyndham Lewis and Spencer Gore. For a young student looking to learn to draw – and to draw well – it was *the* place in England to study. As an historian of the School has written, in the first years of the twentieth century, 'The emphasis on the Slade tradition of draughtsmanship was uppermost: nothing more. In these conditions, and subject to whim or belief, students could be called neither good nor bad. They were either encouraged or discouraged'.[25]

In 1908 Par Spencer took a selection of his son's drawings to show Brown and Tonks. They immediately saw the boy's potential. In fact, they were so impressed that they waived the usual written entrance exam – which, given the poor state of his formal education, Stanley would probably have failed. Lady Boston generously paid the £10 termly fees, and his future now lay in London.

But Gilbert was apprehensive: 'To be trained and yet not guided or steered was going to be the problem for my brother'. Fortunately at the Slade 'this great danger in the period of training, which could disturb any young student, was avoided, since between the staff and the students there was compatibility.

The Slade held a mirror in front of him, the like of which did not exist at home, and he saw himself among the forebears of his art in all their glory. It must have been a revelation to him, although in mood he had been prepared for this moment at home, in his experience of music and literature.'[26]

For Stanley, London was a revelation. Though he hated the daily train journey, he later recalled that his experience of studying at the Slade was

> similar to me to what I imagine it would be if it were possible to get into a book one was reading. The sounds coming in at the open upstairs windows of the long corridor outside the Antique Room, sounds that were coming from the somewhat removed streets, sounds of a barrel-organ playing something which I had heard a cousin playing... It seemed that I and that music was a part of the contents of a book on the cousin's shelf in their house next door. I was so much in the 'Life-Room' that I can't think of any of the students as people one could see in the street anywhere... I liked the girls' paint-covered frocks and walls plastered with palette-knife dabs.[27]

Though they lay on the same river, how could London be more different from Cookham-on-Thames for the young Stanley Spencer? For his brother Gilbert, the two were worlds apart. In 1910 he followed Stanley into an artistic career: he had long been entertaining himself at home making farm animals and toy carts from wood and old pieces of leather. Now he went to study carving at the Camberwell School of Art and Crafts, lodging in south London with another of their many brothers:

> I was quick to realize that here in Brixton we were in the heart of the struggle for survival. The red glare of the London skies killed the starry heavens shining over Cookham, but not the night life of the Brixton Road. Those were the days

> before cold storage, and it was a desperate time to walk down the Atlantic Road late at night, when the lean and hungry ones timed their visits to perfection. They knew the butcher's dilemma, as with each passing minute, they eyed his tumbling prices. By midnight the road was in uproar with high pressure bargaining. It was a cut-throat business, though no throats were cut. There was nothing sinister or sordid about it, just a spirit that was London's, with the evening shoppers swarming round barrows illumined by paraffin flares, and floating on a sea of indescribable litter, and the barrowmen themselves shouting their wares, and offering goods of little value to an intelligent and informed clientele.[28]

This was London in the last days of the Edwardian era, the world's largest city and hub of the greatest Empire history had ever known. For some, London simply was England; but for those born and brought up in the countryside in the early years of the twentieth century, before suburban sprawl or the mass ownership of motorcars, before television or radio, London seemed like another country. Here could be found electric lighting, horse-drawn trams, fast-moving motorcars and underground trains, music halls and cinemas showing motion pictures, smoke-belching factories and City banks with their endless stream of clerks and businessmen, the multiform bustle of hundreds of thousands of people streaming back and forth, a 'slick and snappy city' living the new century's modern life at speed.

But the pleasures of West End cinemas and hotels, smart restaurants and expensive cafés, were pleasures for the wealthy. London was also home to the cripplingly poor, the hungry, the homeless, and a magnet for immigrants and abject refugees escaping political and economic hardships or religious intolerance in Ireland and Eastern Europe. London

seemed to suck them in. At the British Museum, only a few minutes' walk from the Slade, the exiled German revolutionary Karl Marx had sat and written his great work, *Das Kapital*. Here he had laid out his grand critique of the iniquities of Capitalism, a system which meant that whilst a few prospered, millions laboured and starved; whilst a few grew rich and enjoyed the luxury of town squares and country houses, masses inhabited the squalor of 'the abyss' – the East End slums of Whitechapel, Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, the opium dens, sweatshops and ghettos, the pubs, penny gaffs and brothels, the tenements, rookeries and anarchists' clubs of what was dubbed 'the city of endless night'.

In 1894 in his *Tales of Mean Streets*, Arthur Morrison wrote, 'There is no need to say in the East End of what. The East End is a vast city, as famous in its way as any the hand of man has made. But who knows the East End?'[29] Certainly not the village boys Stanley and Gilbert Spencer. The East End's many gloomy enclaves were the place for outsiders: Huguenots had made it their home in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and now the Irish and continental refugees were doing the same.

Here, somewhere among the cramped ghettos inhabited by the 100,000 or so Jewish immigrants, lived another of the promising new students who arrived fresh-faced at the Slade in October 1908: the talented, handsome and wildly ambitious Mark Gertler.