

MORE THAN JUST ‘SQUABBY CUPIDS’? History and myth in Stourhead’s famous Landscape Garden

‘And now from Hyde-Park Corner come
The Gods of Athens, and of Rome.
Here squabby Cupids take their places,
With Venus, and the clumsy Graces:
Apollo there, with aim so clever,
Stretches his leaden bow for ever;
And there, without the pow’r to fly,
Stands fix’d a tip-toe Mercury.’

Robert Lloyd, *The Cit’s Country Box*,
The Gentleman’s Magazine, September 1756, p. 445.

Between 1745 and 1766 more than 25 statues were purchased for Henry Hoare’s gardens at Stourhead, Wiltshire.¹ Most were 18th-century sculptures or casts, and the 2nd-century *Livia Augusta as Ceres* is the only one from the classical Roman age. This statue stands in the Pantheon, together with Rysbrack’s *Hercules* and his reduced-sized version of the *Capitoline Flora*. These three are the only marble statues in the garden.

The others are either of lead or plaster of Paris, depending upon whether the statue was purchased for outdoor or indoor display. The nine John Cheere lead statues that once occupied niches at the Temple of Apollo were likely to have been stock items: they are of relatively poor quality in comparison with his river god in the cave beside the Grotto. At £98 it was considerably more costly than the Temple of Apollo statues—the most expensive of these was £21.² This difference seems to indicate that the river god figure was a bespoke item. The statue is possibly by John Cheere’s brother, Sir Henry Cheere, or perhaps even by Rysbrack. Kenneth Woodbridge has proposed that the statue was influenced by Salvator Rosa’s *The Dream of Aeneas*, which is indeed a close match in terms of its stance with arm upraised.³ However, the figure

may also have been influenced by earlier illustrated editions of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in which the god is also drawn in a pose and composition similar to that of the Grotto statue (see illustration, right). This hypothesis is supported by visitor accounts from 1766 which record the presence of a wooden plaque hung in front of the river god’s cavern bearing lines from Ovid’s tale of Daphne and Peneus.⁴



The painted lead statue of the River God in the Grotto, by John Cheere c.1751

Recent research has challenged the provenance of the statues and the purpose of their selection for the gardens at Stourhead.¹ It has also established that the location of some statues has



‘Livia Augusta as Ceres’, marble statue in the Pantheon

changed. As a consequence, the possible meaning of the original statue arrangements has been lost, and on occasion meaning has been created by the repositioning of statues in proximity to one another. In this article I will focus upon the context of statues in the interior chamber of the Pantheon, as well as those that occupy the exterior niches.

Until recently it has been supposed that *Livia Augusta as Ceres* (see above) at Stourhead was purchased from the sale of Dr Richard Mead’s collection of antiquities in 1754.⁵ However, it is more likely that the statue was sold to Henry Hoare on the



The river-god Peneus seated on rocks in a waterfall at left, surrounded by other water-gods and nymphs; later state with numbers burnished; after Hendrik Goltzius (1589)

death of Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni in 1740, when Henry was visiting Rome as part of his Grand Tour. Around this time Henry also acquired the Sixtus Cabinet (see *Roman Splendour, English Arcadia*, by Simon Jervis and Dudley Dodd, 2014). The cabinet provided him with a grand focus for the house, and the statue offered the prospect of an equally grand cynosure for the gardens. Henry Flitcroft was probably commissioned to design a suitable edifice to house this new acquisition. Hence the first garden building at Stourhead was the Temple of Ceres. The poem *Stourton Gardens* clearly locates the statue in the Temple of Ceres in 1749, and Jonas Hanway writes that the statue was still to be viewed there in 1757.⁶ ⁷ However, by the time of Horace Walpole's visit in 1762 the statue was located in the Pantheon,



'The Choice of Hercules', Nicolas Poussin, c.1636/1637, by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665)

placed on the left of Rysbrack's version of the Farnese Hercules and opposite his statue of Flora.⁸ Placing Hercules between statues of Flora and Ceres is a clear indication of the intention to create meaning. Ceres is the goddess of cultivated food, symbolic of industriousness, and Flora is the goddess of flowers and wild foods. As Charlesworth has observed, placing Hercules between Ceres and Flora, with his head orientated towards Ceres, is an illustration, with different subject matter, of the popular 'Judgment of Hercules' theme.⁹ The Poussin painting of the same subject hangs in the house (see illustration, above).

A further pairing in the Pantheon is the lead version of the *Versailles Diana* with a plaster Meleager. These two subjects are linked in classical myth by the story of the Calydonian Boar, and the purchase of a pendant Meleager is therefore likely to be a specific selection. However, the use of a lead statue (the *Versailles Diana*) indoors is unusual; the likely explanation is that this is the Diana statue purchased as a pair to the now lost copy after



An artist's impression of the Pantheon c.1787

the *Apollo Belvedere* in 1745. Apollo once stood on a mound on the south lawn, and recent research has indicated that the Diana statue originally occupied the grove at the summit of the 'Mount of Diana', later the site of the Turkish tent.¹

The remaining two Pantheon statues are John Cheere plaster copies of the *Capitoline Isis* and Duquesnoy's *Saint Susanna*. As Carlo Gastone della Torre di Rezzonico commented in 1787, it is odd to find a Christian martyr in a pagan temple, and Isis seems a similarly unusual selection.¹ Perhaps the most economical explanation is that the choice was made in emulation of the same statues being selected for other English estates, such as Holkham Hall. The *Saint Susanna* and the *Isis* statues were also originally grouped with a Capitoline Flora

and Bacchus in the saloon at Kedleston.¹⁰

Walpole's account of a visit to Stourhead mentions that the exterior Pantheon niches were occupied by unspecified statues.⁸ Fortunately, Gastone recorded that the left front niche featured a Venus Anadyomene and the right front niche a Bacchus, though he does not specify the particular type. The left side niche was occupied by a copy of the *Faun of Florence*, usually known as *The Dancing Faun*. (The scene described by Gastone is shown as an artist's impression, below left). *The Faun of Florence* was definitely there in 1867.¹¹ However, these three exterior niche statues have not survived, and we have no details of their fate. The front niches of the Pantheon are currently occupied by statues of Venus and Bacchus. However, the Venus statue is a callipygian (Greek for 'nice bottom') variant, rather than the anadyomene (Greek for 'rising from the sea') version reported by Gastone. It seems likely that the current statues are the ones that originally occupied two of the niches at the Temple of Apollo.

We would ordinarily expect statues of the muses to be found at a temple dedicated to Apollo. However, the sole muse purchased for a Temple of Apollo niche at Stourhead was Urania, the muse of astronomy. The other Cheere statues purchased with Urania for the Temple of Apollo niches were of Venus, Bacchus, Ceres, Minerva, Pomona, Mercury, and Vesta, along with an *Apollino*. Ceres, Minerva and Pomona currently stand on the top of the house's front pediment. Mercury, Vesta, Urania, and the *Apollino* statue all adorn the west front. Pairings of Bacchus and Venus are common, as the statues are often used to symbolize wine and love. The pairing is also occasionally linked with Ceres, who as the goddess of cereal crops represents bread. As a trio these statues are an iconographic representation of the expression well-known in ancient Rome, *Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus*—'Venus stays frigid without Ceres and Bacchus'. Paintings and sketches of the Temple of Apollo indicate that the front right niche nearest the

entrance was in 1814 occupied by a statue of Bacchus, and in the next niche stood the Callipygian Venus. Unfortunately it has not so far been possible to determine the identity of the next adjacent statue. However, we know that Urania, Vesta, and the *Apollino* statue were placed in niches on the left side of the temple, leaving only Ceres, Mercury or Pomona as candidates for the niche adjacent to the statue of Venus.

The statues selected for display at Stourhead are typical choices for an 18th-century English landscape garden, and most feature amongst those listed in Haskell and Penny's catalogue of popular 18th-century choices.¹² Many of the statues are copies of those that were on public view in Rome and Florence, and it seems likely that their selection was at least in part influenced by Henry Hoare's Grand Tour experience. A further possibility is that they reflect Flitcroft's influence, which in turn derived from his tutelage under Lord Burlington and William Kent. Whichever is the case, it seems that the statues were selected in part according to the fashion of the day, but in some cases also with a specific iconography in mind.

Dr John Harrison CSci CPsychol AFBP&S

Notes

- ¹ Harrison, John, 'The development and content of Stourhead Gardens: Recent findings, insight from an eighteenth-century poem and the visit of Carlo Gastone della Torre di Rezzonico in 1787', *Garden History*, in press.
- ² 'To Mr. Cheere for the river god, etc. £98', 383/4, 7th August 1751, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham, UK. 'Henry Hoare esq. from Mr. Cheere, to five drapery statues of a Vesta, Ceres, Pomona....', 383/4, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham, UK.
- ³ Woodbridge, Kenneth, 'The Dream of Aeneas: A Rosa Source for Cheere's River God at Stourhead.' *Burlington Magazine*, December 1974, 116, p.756.
- ⁴ Anonymous, 1766. British Museum, Add MS 6767, f.37.
- ⁵ Laing, Alastair, *Stourhead: Illustrated List of Pictures and Sculpture*, 2010 (London: National Trust), p. 19.
- ⁶ Anonymous, 'Stourton Gardens: Written in June 1749', *The Royal Magazine*, February 1764, pp. 102-4
- ⁷ Hanway, Jonas, 'Journey through Wiltshire, &c', 1757, *The London Chronicle*, June 16-18, pp. 578-579.
- ⁸ Walpole, Horace, *The History of the Modern Taste in Gardening*, 1786 (London: J Dodsley).
- ⁹ Charlesworth, Michael. 1989. 'On meeting Hercules in Stourhead Garden', *Garden History*, 9, 2, pp. 71-75.
- ¹⁰ Garnett, Oliver, *Kedleston Hall*, 1999 (London: National Trust), p.8.
- ¹¹ *Proceedings of the Bath Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club*. Vol 1, Bath, Bleack and Leach, 1867-79, p. 78.
- ¹² Haskell, Francis and Penny, Nicholas, *Taste and the Antique*, 1981, (New Haven: Yale University Press).

ACQUISITIONS

CHARTWELL

A group of 35 paintings by Sir Winston Churchill (1872–1965), 40 books (in 54 volumes), one manuscript and 11 other items including furniture, robes, medals and insignia, silver and photographs associated with Churchill and his wife Clementine, Lady Churchill (1885–1977), were accepted in lieu of inheritance tax on the estate of the Right Hon. the Lady Soames (1922–2014) and allocated to the National Trust for display at Chartwell, settling £7,986,930 in tax.

SHERINGHAM

A watercolour portrait of the Hon. Mrs Abbot Upcher, née Charlotte Wilson (1790–1857), by C.G. Vale, 1820, has been donated to Sheringham by Mrs Rosemary Harrison. Charlotte and her husband Abbot Upcher commissioned Humphrey Repton to remodel the landscape at Sheringham. This portrait was painted soon after Abbot Upcher died (in 1819). Inv. no. 2900112.



Portrait of Charlotte Upcher, 1820, donated to Sheringham

STANDEN

A portrait of Samuel Beale, MP (1803–74), English School, oil on canvas, was donated by Beale & Co solicitors, London. Samuel Beale was an ironmaster supplying track to the burgeoning railways, mayor of Birmingham in 1841, MP for Derby and chairman of the Midland Railway from 1858 to 1864. He was also the uncle of James Beale (1840–1912), the builder of Standen. Inv. no. 2900106.

WALLINGTON

A portrait of Jane Weller, later Lady Wilson (1749–1818), aged sixteen, oil on canvas, has been purchased at auction at Bellman's, West Sussex, for £1,364, partly funded by gifts and bequests. Jane's daughter Maria mar-

ried Sir John Trevelyan, 5th Bt. of Wallington in 1791. Jane was a pioneer beetle expert and part of her collection of natural history specimens is still in the museum room at Wallington.

WIMPOLE

A collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century porcelain has been donated to Wimpole Hall. The collection includes cups and saucers, milk jugs and sugar pots, plates and other dishes, baskets and various figures from the Chelsea, Derby, Höchst, Meissen, Sèvres, Vincennes and Swansea workshops. Apart from the intrinsic significance of the porcelain, it is also in harmony with the taste of the last private owner of Wimpole, Mrs Elsie Bambridge (1896–1976).

A Meissen figure group, modelled by Peter Reinicke, about 1750, part of a collection donated to Wimpole Hall

Emile de Bruijn, Registrar (Collections & Grants)



Portrait of Jane Weller, later Lady Wilson, about 1765, purchased for Wallington

