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SCULPTURES FORMERLY AT WENTWORTH WOODHOUSE



Figure 1

2. *Young Centaur (tempted by love)* 3. *Old Centaur (bound by love)*
height (to top of raised arm) 102 cm height 90 cm



Figure 2



Figure 3

PROVENANCE

- York Conservation Trust, 2002 to present day¹
- York Assembly Rooms and City of York Council, 1950-2002
- Wentworth Woodhouse sale, 1949²
- Grosvenor Square townhouse inventory, 1782³
- 30 April 1761, 'To Prestage for the two marble centaurs £63'⁴
- Almost certainly carved by Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, Rome, c.1755⁵

The *Young Centaur* with his right arm raised in celebration, is, as noted by Pasquier and Martinez⁶, 'ecstatic with joy and laughter, delighted with the presence of the young god on his back'. He is also very proud to display the pelt of a wild boar or goat, draped across his left arm, and holds a knurled club, which may, perhaps, be meant to represent the spinal column of the unfortunate animal.



Figure 4 and 5

The centaur's face is satyr-like, with pointed ears and mischievous grin, and this may reflect the many associations in ancient mythology, between centaurs and Bacchus (Dionysus), the god of wine and fertility. This relationship is also suggested, not only by the Bacchanalian symbols on the supporting tree trunk and the pipes and the branch with pine cones, but also by the crown of grapes and vine leaf on the infant's head.



Figure 6

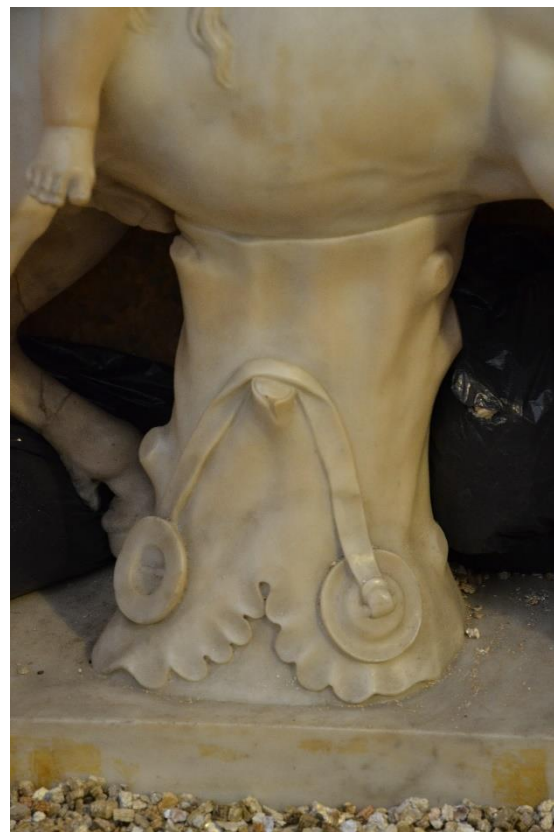


Figure 7

Some 18th-century historians, as noted by Haskell and Penny⁷, observed that an infant figure, presented in this way, might be a symbol of Bacchanalian intoxication rather than erotic power. It is the presence of wings (now lost) however, which seems to contradict this assertion, and it is more likely that the infant figure represents the 'invincible force of love'⁸. What is remarkable is the fine modelling of the composition. The centaur's muscles are powerfully represented, although not given too much emphasis, and the attention to detail is of a very high standard. Even the carving of the genitalia is not left to the imagination (when displayed on a plinth as intended, this would be at eye level). The *Young Centaur's* phallus is shown sheathed, but not so the *Old Centaur's*, which can be observed in a state of some excitement.

The *Old Centaur*, as seen from his ungainly posture, is in a state of anguish, tortured by desire and with a face marked by rage and concern. On his left shoulder is a pelt of a panther or leopard (animals often associated with Bacchus), and claws from one paw dig into his shoulder. The tail of the animal's pelt is being used to bind the centaur's arms behind his back.

The young figure of Eros, riding freely on his back, is, like the infant figure on the other statue, crowned with vine leaves and grapes. His body is, however, a realistic depiction of chubby flesh being squeezed by a type of belt traditionally given to trainee riders in Hellenistic times.⁹



Figure 8

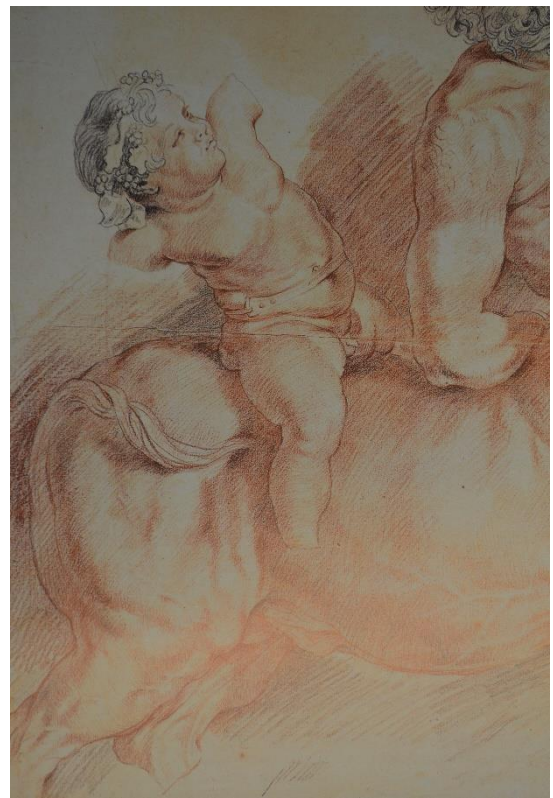


Figure 9

The composition of this group (although only two-thirds size) is similar to a damaged statue said to have been discovered on the estates of the Fonseca family, adjoining the Lateran in Rome, in around 1600.¹⁰ Peter Paul Rubens, who was twice in Rome between 1600 and 1608, sketched the statue in its damaged state from different angles, and other sketches show some interesting details.¹¹ The statue were restored by Nicholas Cordier around 1607, and engraved by François Perrier, for inclusion in his famous book on the hundred most important antiquities of Italy.¹² This *Centaur with Cupid* entered the Borghese collection, and remained there until acquired by Napoleon Bonaparte for display in Paris in about 1810, and it now forms part of the collection in the Louvre. There are many similarities between the *Borghese Centaur with Cupid* and the Wentworth Woodhouse (WW) version of the *Old Centaur*. The infants

on their backs, for example, could be twins, although in some respects the WW version is more finely modelled. Variations include the lack of any animal pelt on the *Borghese Centaur* (and seemingly never there, certainly not illustrated in the Rubens drawings) and, consequently, no evidence of any binding using the tail of the animal.



Figure 10



Figure 11

Also the supporting column, which Cordier placed there in around 1607, is a much simpler version to that on the WW example.

A more informative comparator, with even more strikingly similar features, is provided by the so-called *Furietti Centaurs* now in the Capitoline Museum in



Rome. Discovered by Monsignor Furietti during the excavations of Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, they were on display at his home in the Palazzo Montecitorio from 1740, and later bought from Furietti's heirs by Pope Clement XI in 1765.¹³ The statues are thought to date from around 100 AD, although some scholars suggest they may be even earlier. The *WW Centaurs* are only two-thirds size, but careful comparison with the *Furietti Centaurs* reveals many precise features, not recorded in any of the drawings or engravings, and it is almost certain the *WW Centaurs* are high-quality marble copies. The *Furietti Centaurs* were later produced as casts by Bartolomeo Cavaceppi in 1765, and a pair was provided to Joseph Nollekens, who worked in Rome from 1760 to 1767, for sale to Lord Anson at Shugborough (the pair are still on display in the entrance hall today). Other casts were made: another pair, purchased for the Royal Academy in 1781, can now be seen in the entrance to the Courtauld Institute in London. One likelihood is that the *WW Centaurs* are copies which combine the *Furietti* torsos with the *Borghese* infant and another version of an infant seen on a statue of the *Vatican Centaur with Hare*.¹⁴ The extensive damage and restoration of the *WW Centaurs* may, however, point to an earlier period, and this is a theory that should not be readily dismissed. What is clear is that they seem to be the most complete ensemble to be discovered so far (albeit without their wings), and it is fascinating they have now come to light, having been on display, first in the York Assembly Rooms, then in York Art Gallery during the *Masterpieces from Yorkshire Houses* exhibition in 1994, and then languishing in their storerooms for over 20 years.

STANDS



The mahogany stands made for displaying the Centaurs have now been reunited with the statues and a close study reveals a remarkable degree of design and composition. Nicholas Penny felt these stands to be 'of special interest, with scrolled shields and swags splendidly carved and gilt'.

Figure 14
Figure 15



The top plates, for example, which match the size of the bases of the statues, have a clever ball-and-cup mechanism, allowing the statues to be rotated (there are even notches cut to house felt strips intended to prevent scratching). As a result, the statues can then be positioned from the front or side, and moved with little physical effort. Constructed of oak with mahogany veneers and mouldings, they are designed in a restrained English rococo fashion. On the front and back deep-cut mahogany cabochons are set against shallow fielded panels, and embraced by elegant gilt scrolls. These are supported by a stem of reeds bound by a ribbon that terminate in a flurry of scrolling pommels. Issuing from this central element are a series of finely carved and gilded swags that link through to the sides, where handsome ribbon and laurel leaf margents are set within a narrow fielded panel. The makers of these remarkable stands are, as yet, unknown, but they might have been provided by the Wakefield firm of Wright and Elwick, which regularly appears in Lord Rockingham's accounts.¹⁵ However, a London firm is more likely, given that the Centaurs were first on display in the London townhouse from 1761 to 1782, before being transferred with the other contents to Wentworth Woodhouse on the death of Lord Rockingham.

CONTEXT

It is not difficult to understand why Lord Rockingham purchased a pair of marble Centaurs (and not plaster copies which he felt were too fragile for transportation, and had a 'rather mean look') when they were eventually available to him (see note 4). His experiences in Italy during 1749 and 1750 were formative, and, greatly encouraged by his father, he ordered marble copies of many of the famous antique statues for display at his Yorkshire home, Wentworth Woodhouse.¹⁶ The *Furietti Centaurs* were just as celebrated as any Flora or Venus, but no copies of the Centaurs were available at the time of his visit to Rome. The horse was of the greatest importance in art from classical times, displaying not only docility, but also speed and strength. The Centaurs represented an amalgam of man and beast, and characterised the less controllable but exciting aspects of human behaviour. Also his lordship was, without doubt, 'horse mad'. In 1765, when he was asked for the first time to form a government and become the 'First Minister', the famous cynic, Horace Walpole, noted: Rockingham 'having been only known....by his passion for horse races, men could not be cured of their surprise.'¹⁷ Rockingham had many paintings of horses by Stubbs throughout the mansion. In the main Dining Room was a huge canvas of *Whistlejacket*, the famous horse that won the 2,000 guineas at York in 1769.¹⁸ In the Drawing Room, the fireplace, carved by John Fisher of York, has a tablet showing a chariot of Bacchus being pulled by centaurs, and, prior to 1782, there hung nearby a framed drawing of a centaur which might be one of the drawings or engravings produced by Rubens (see note 11). There is also an interesting letter from Sir James Wright, the British

Resident to the Republic of Venice, dated 28 February 1774,¹⁹ in which he refers to the supply of two centaurs, but it is now clear he meant small bronzes. Wright lists them as being by Sansovino (1486-1570), and says that he selected them from the Grimani Collection²⁰. The young Lord Malton's 'Grand Tour' (he was created the Marquis of Rockingham in 1751) left him with a deep impression of Italy and its treasures. To his father's chagrin, he abandoned his French studies in favour of Italian, and in each city he visited he met many of the heads of Italian nobility²¹. In Rome he dined with the Borghese, and supped with senior clerics, such as Cardinals Albani, Spinelli, and Colonna, together with Monsignor Furietti (not elevated to a Cardinal's hat until 1759). In Venice he visited the Grimani family, so his experience of these great palaces and their famous collections was significant in developing his own taste and appreciation for the antique.

Recent Display History in the Gallery (information supplied by Richard Green)

The Centaurs on their stands were continuously displayed at the Gallery from 1975 to 2003, after which they were put in storage. Initially the sculptures were installed by John Ingamells in the front corners of the entrance hall. They remained there for about ten years, until displaced in the mid-1980s by the insertion of a screen wall housing inner entrance doors, which remains. Thereupon they were moved into the front part of the ground-floor Main Gallery, otherwise containing Continental Old Master paintings. After another ten years or thereabouts, the Centaurs were incorporated in the 1994 exhibition *Masterpieces from Yorkshire Houses* held in the ground-floor South Gallery. Following the close of that show the Centaurs were retained in the South Gallery, complementing British eighteenth century-century paintings.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Wentworth Woodhouse, by Nathaniel Whittock, c.1830

Fig. 2. Young Centaur (tempted by Love)

Fig. 3. Old Centaur (bound by Love)

Fig. 4. Young Centaur with Eros on his back

Fig. 5. Pelt of an animal on his arm

Fig. 6. Arm raised in celebration

Fig. 7. Stand decorated with cymbals

Fig. 8. Old Centaur being ruled by Eros

Fig. 9. Rubens sketch of the excavated Centaur.

Fig. 10. Claws of pelt digging into the Centaur's chest

Fig. 11. Tail of the pelt binding the wrists together.

Fig. 12. Young Furietti Centaur (black marble)

Fig. 13. Old Furietti Centaur (black marble)

Fig. 14. Mahogany stand

Fig. 15. Mahogany stand (detail)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been greatly assisted in the preparation of this report by David Allott (Wentworth Woodhouse), Dr. Sarah Burnage, Dr. Gill Chitty (University of York), Dr. Joan Coutu (University of Waterloo), Natacha Dauphin, Lorna Foster, Melissa Gustin, Tim Knebel (archivist, Sheffield Archives), Agnes Scherer (Dept. of Antiquities, Louvre Museum, Paris), the Staff of the Morrell Library (University of York), and Dr. Dick Reid.

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1. York Conservation Trust purchased the Assembly Rooms and its contents from the City of York Council on 20 November 2002.
 2. Sold through Henry Spencer, Retford, Tuesday 5 July 1949, Lot 423, £178. The statues were purchased, on behalf of the City Corporation, by the York antique-dealer Charles Thornton. They were presented for display in the Assembly Rooms in anticipation of the 1951 Festival celebrations. They were located in two niches at the far end of the rooms, something which was never considered a satisfactory arrangement. In 1975 the Estate Committee of York Corporation wrote to the Art Gallery to seek a more appropriate location, but always with the proviso that they return to the Assembly Rooms if so requested. This never happened, and the pair languished in the Art Gallery store until 2012, when, in anticipation of a major restoration programme at the Art Gallery, they were rediscovered and returned to the new owners of the Assembly Room (that is, York Conservation Trust).
 3. When Lord Rockingham died in 1782, inventories of Wentworth Woodhouse (WW) and the London townhouse in Grosvenor Square were prepared by Charles Bowns and Jacob Brown (see Sheffield Archives, WWM/A/1204). It was agreed by the beneficiary, Earl Fitzwilliam, and the Executors, that all the items listed in both inventories be deemed 'heirlooms', and they thus became part of the entail for future generations. The items at the townhouse would be transferred to WW, and loans from the collection made to Lady Rockingham in her lifetime. The transfer of the statues took place, and the Centaurs appear first on display in the 'Low room in the South Tower', and then by 1857 they are recorded in the 'Museum Room', where they remained until the 1949 sale.
 4. WWM/4/1000: A Journal of payments (small personal book written in Rockingham's hand), 1760-64. This was the entry seen by Rupert Gunnis, while compiling his 'Dictionary of Sculptors in Britain, 1660-1851. He records the statues as 'location unknown'. Edward Presetage and his partner, Peter Vandecom, had a small Antiques Saleroom at 24 Saville Row (Survey of London vols 31 and 32). Lord Rockingham also purchased a crucifix and other items from the saleroom in 1764 (WWM/R229/81). The pair had trained as masons, however, and in 1747-9 were employed by the Duke of Portland to restore the gardens at Soho Square. The project cost £720, and they supplied iron railings, brick bases, Portland Stone kerbs, and Kentish ragstone paving flags (Survey

of London vols 33 and 34). Gunnis records them working for the Duke of Chandos in 1754.

5. I. Bignamini and C. Hornsby, *Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Rome*, Yale, 2010, pp. 252-5, where there is a useful article on Cavaceppi, his workshop, and details of his many English clients (who included Lord Rockingham). The sculptor had access to all the great collections in Rome (and was involved in restoring many of the statues for the Borghese, the Vatican, and Furietti). His studio carved many copies of the most famous antiques. It is clear that the WW Centaurs draw heavily for their detail, on having first-hand knowledge of the centaurs in the collections mentioned above, and Cavaceppi is the most obvious candidate.
6. A. Pasquier and J-L Martinez, *100 chefs-d'oeuvre de la Sculpture grecque au Louvre*, Paris, 2007. I am grateful to Agnes Scherer, Dept. of Antiquities, Musée du Louvre, for bringing this publication to my attention.
7. F. Haskell and N. Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, Yale, 1981, p.179. The authors of this seminal work were discussing a related statue the *Centaur with Cupid*, formerly in the Borghese collection, but now at the Louvre, Paris. They were noting the comments made by Roman scholar, Ennio Quirino Visconti, in his book *Monumenti Borghesiani*, 1796.
8. Haskell and Penny, p.179
9. Pasquier and Martinez, p. 185.
10. Haskell and Penny, p. 179.
11. Marjon van der Meulen, *Rubens' Copies after the Antique*, Brepols, 1994, pp. 83-6, nos. 65-9. Of all the books that feature the drawings by Rubens of the *Centaur with Cupid*, this is probably the most comprehensive study. It also includes subsequent engravings by Christoffel Jegher and others.
12. François Perrier, *Segmenta nobilium signorum et statuarum*, Rome 1638, pls. 7 and 8. He illustrates the restored statue, from the front and rear.
13. Haskell and Penny, pp. 176-9.
14. W. Knight, *Vatican Centaur with Hare*
15. WWM/4/1000.
16. J. Scott, *The Pleasures of the Antique: British Collectors of Greece and Rome*, Paul Mellon Centre, 2003, p. 118. Whilst on his 'Grand Tour' in 1748-9, Lord Malton focussed on commissioning marble copies of some of the most celebrated antique statues, for display in the Great Hall at Wentworth Woodhouse. As Scott noted, Lord Malton wrote to his father: 'as I hear it will be impossible to have antique statues, and as the models made from them in plaster of paris are so easily broke and at best have a mean look, and will never be proper for so fine a Room as the Great Hall, I intend trying to get Copies done in marble of the best antique statues'. He ordered eight versions, four from Roman sculptors, the *Capitoline Venus* from Cavaceppi, the *Germanicus* and *Capitoline Flora* from Filippo della Valle (then working at Versailles), and the *Callipygian Venus* from Giovanni Battista Maini. The British sculptors working in Rome provided the *Apollino* and *Dancing Faun* by Simon Vierpyl, and the *Medici Venus* and *Faun with Kid* by Joseph Wilton.
17. Quoted in Ross Hoffman, *The Marquis: A Study of Lord Rockingham, 1730-82*, Fordham Press, USA, 1973, p. 79. This is a comprehensive analysis of the political life of Lord Rockingham and his contemporaries during tensions over the matter of American independence. Hoffman also highlights how important York Race meetings were for the Whig party. Rockingham had formed his 'Rockingham Club' in 1753, with over 130 of the landed gentry and nobility signed up as members at the first meeting.

18. Sheffield Archives, WWM/R229/1-133.

This selection of miscellaneous invoices records payments totalling £ 374.5.0d to Stubbs, over the period 1762-76. The artist, who studied anatomy in York, was invited by Rockingham in 1762, to spend 'some months' at Wentworth Woodhouse, painting his horses. Most of the output was in traditional landscape format and included 'a picture of a brood-mare and two foals, one picture of three stallions and one figure, one picture of a figure on horseback, one picture of five dogs, and another of one dog with one single horse'. Stubbs also provided 'a lion and horse large as life', but it is the heroic scale and audacity of the Whistlejacket painting that soon became a legend. The 1782 inventory also lists the 'Godolfin Arabian by Stubbs' and 'a coach horse by Killingbeck'.

19. WWM/R229/1-133, No. 81. The 1782 inventories do include garnitures of bronze statues, which were presumably meant to adorn the mantelshelves of fireplaces. A rare depiction of such a display can be seen in the painting by Zoffany, of Lord Dundas and his grandson, in the townhouse at Arlington Street, London, in 1769.

20. M. Perry, *Cardinal Domenico Grimani's Legacy of Ancient Art to Venice*, Warburg Institute, 1978, vol. 41, pp. 215-44. This essay provides a comprehensive over-view of how the collection started and explains its significance in Venetian society.

21. Sheffield Archives WWM/R/170/1-27; Notes and notebooks of Lord Malton (afterwards Marquis of Rockingham) during his European tours c.1749-50. Amongst these documents is a small notebook in Lord Malton's hand, listing those he met on his visits. Using a series of code dots, he noted who 'he dined with', who he 'supped with', when he had been 'in their home', and those he found 'handsomist'.
