RCEWA – Two Roman figures of Celtic hounds

Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the hounds meet Waverley criteria one and three.

Further Information

The ‘Note of Case History’ is available on the Arts Council Website:

www.artscouncil.org.uk/reviewing-committee-case-hearings

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. **Brief Description of item(s)**

The objects consist of two Roman marble figures of Celtic hounds, dated around the 2nd century AD. They are made of white marble, possibly north Italian white marble, but also possibly Greek (Thassian or Parian), exact provenance of marble cannot be easily surmised, without close inspection of the objects.

The male hound is seated upright with his head tilted upwards, wearing a studded collar, its body with a visibly defined ribcage, seated with its tail between his legs on a base. The female celtic hound is shown seated wearing a wide studded collar, the slender body naturalistically carved, with her right foreleg raised, her hips and left paw resting on an integral arch-shaped base. Her muzzle, ears, part of the neck and the lower half of the raised right foreleg bear signs of historic restoration (probably conducted in the 18th century). The objects are 74.5cm and 68cm high respectively. The sculptor or school that produced the hounds is unknown.

The condition of the objects looks satisfactory, again I have not observed the objects from close-by and have only seen photographs. On the male hound's body, there are clear abrasions in the area of the right shoulder. Again, I am not aware of a detailed condition report for the objects.

2. **Context**

- **Provenance**

There exists substantial provenance information for the two Roman celtic hounds. The objects were excavated from the ruins of Antoninus Pius’ Laurentine villa by prince Chigi at around 1795-6 (information supplied by Westmacott, *British galleries of Painting and Sculpture*, London 1824). The objects were later acquired by Thomas Hope in Italy between 1795-1803 and later, by descent to Lord Henry Francis Hope Pelham-Clinton -Hope (1866-1941).

The objects were originally displayed in the statue gallery, Duchess Street, London from 1804-1849. They were later moved to Deepdene House in Dorking, Surrey where Adolf Michaelis saw them in the gallery of the Entrance Hall.

Subsequently the objects were presented at a Christie’s auction in London 23-24 July 1917 (*Catalogue of the Celebrated Collection of Greek, Roman &Egyptian Sculpture and Ancient Greek Vases, Being a Portion of the Hope Heirlooms*, Christies, July 1917). I am not sure who purchased the objects during this sale, but the Bonhams July 2019 action catalogue states that the present owner acquired those by descent from the buyer of the July 1917 sale¹.

¹ [https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/25388/lot/151/](https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/25388/lot/151/)
**Key literary and exhibition references**

The objects have appeared in the following publications:

T. D. Fosbrooke, The Outlines of Statues in the Possession of Mr Hope, (never published), for which illustrations were furnished by T. D. Fosbrooke, London, 1813, pl. 4.


A. Michaelis, Ancient Marbles in Great Britain, Cambridge, 1882, p. 287, nos. 21 and 23.


G. Rodenwaldt, Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, 48, 1933, p. 204-5.


**3. Waverley criteria**

The pair of marble hounds meets two of the Waverley criteria, in particular:

**Criterion 1:** This is because the objects are connected to a long history of collecting in the United Kingdom. In particular, they were part of the Thomas Hope collection, one of the most renowned art and antiquities collections in the country. The Thomas Hope roman sculpture collection in particular is of significant importance; in particular the two hounds would have been one of his earliest acquisitions and were subsequently displayed in the statue gallery of his London townhouse in Duchess street, between 1804-1849.

**Criterion 3:** The objects can contribute to the study and teaching of the history of collecting and the history of particular collections and museums in Britain from the 17th ce AD and onwards.
DETAILED CASE

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item(s).

The pair of hounds bears resemblance in terms of technique, anatomical details and sculptural size with the Townley greyhounds in the collection of the British Museum (accession number:1805,0703.8). The British Museum group depicts a male and female pair at play2. They were excavated in 1774 at Monte Cagniolo along with another greyhound group that was acquired for the Vatican in the year of their excavation and is currently displayed at the Vatican Museum, Belvedere Palace, Room of Animals, (TY 12/3: Library 4).

As the two groups resemble in technique and anatomical details, keeping the Hope group within the United Kingdom, will provide increased opportunities for students or other interested bodies to study their typology and technique, particular if they were to be displayed within logical distance. Although depictions of hounds in marble, or on tombstones or even inscriptions or epitaphs naming pet dogs, were common during roman times, there exist few examples of them on display in British Museums.

2https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=459870&partId=1&searchText=Townley++hounds&page=1