



G256

This striking white statuary and Sienna marble chimneypiece boasts a finely carved statuary centre tablet depicting a scene from the ancient legend of Androcles and the Lion, depicting Androcles removing a thorn from its paw. This story was ascribed to Aesop from medieval times. The frieze is supported by a pair of free standing, fluted, cable stopped Ionic columns beneath distinctive Bacchic goat mask decorated blocking.

Dimensions

Height 66 $\frac{3}{4}$ in (169.5cm) width 86 $\frac{1}{4}$ in (219cm)

Internal height 46in (117cm) width 51 $\frac{3}{4}$ in (131cm)

Provenance

A mid-18th century marble chimneypiece of superb quality from the London workshops of the highly successful sculptor and leading Rococo designer Sir Henry Cheere 1703–81. He ran a major business in monuments, statues and chimneypieces many carved by assistants and subcontractors under his direction. His work is renowned for its consistent high quality.

Closely related examples from Cheere's workshops are known, including the following:

Lady Lever Gallery, National Museum Merseyside, advertised by the London dealers Litchfields in *The Connoisseur*, XXX, April 1916. This has identical columns, blockings and tablet.

Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincs, Sate Drawing Room, one of at least three chimneys purchased by the Earl of Ancaster from Cheere in the 1750s. See Courtauld Institute of Art photos (PS A1/305) and *Country Life*, Jackson Stops, Nov/Dec 1987.

No 6 Great George Street, London, with identical columns blockings and tablet, illustrated in *Survey of London*, vol 10, 1926, St Margeret, Westminster, part 1, plate 30. The house was demolished in 1910 and the chimneypiece was removed to Roehampton House, Surrey and was illustrated in F Lenygon, *Decoration in England*, 1914, fig 116.

West Wycombe Park, Bucks, Saloon, one of several purchased by Sir Francis Dashwood. Courtauld 216350.

Horton Hall, Northants, demolished 1936, one of at least two chimneypieces purchased by the Earl of Halifax, this closely follows another of Cheere's designs, VAM D 715 (1), 1887, and was illustrated in L A Shuffrey, *The English Fireplace*, 1912, plate 192, and in F Lenygon, *Decoration in England*, 1914, p 119, and was advertised in *The Connoisseur*, August 1955 by Adam Acton.

Cheere's main chimneypiece competitors Benjamin and Thomas Carter produced their own version of this centre tablet notably for Saltram, Devon, Uppark, Sussex, Newstead Abbey, Notts and Russbrough, Ireland

During the 18th century proverbs, wise sayings and adages were popular daily fare and were used for witty entertainment and sage advice. Aesop's fables were a sought after source and when depicted as engravings or in three dimensional form also served as reminders of human virtue and frailty. Cheere retired in 1769 and his "Entire large and valuable collection of statuary busts, basso reliefs in marble terra-cotta and gesso" were sold by Longford and Son in Convent Garden on 26 and 27 March 1770, the terra-cotta model was sold on the first day "Tablets and Freezes in Terra-Cota", lot 56, "One, Androcles taking the thorn out of lions foot" for £3-6 shillings, buyer unknown but not purchased by Cheere's ex manager Richard Haywood (1726–1800) who made major purchases for his newly established chimneypiece manufacturing business.