

HENRY ROSSI

1791-1844

THE BOWLER

Marble

37 x 12 x 20 inches; 940 x 305 x 510 mm

Sculpted in c.1822



Collections: Possibly commissioned by William Ward (1787-1849);
Henry Ward (1816-1873), son of the above by inheritance;¹
Stone House, Palos Verdes, California;
Craig Wright, Los Angeles to 2023;
Lowell Libson & Jonny Yarker Ltd.

Literature: James Pycroft, *The Cricket-Field or the History and the Science of the Game of Cricket*, London, 1862, p.116;
Frederick Lillywhite, *Cricket Scores and Biographies*, London, 1862, I, p.361;
Robin Simon and Alastair Smart, *The Art of Cricket*, London, 1983, pp.99-100;
Ingrid Roscoe, *A Biographical Dictionary of Sculptors in Britain 1660-1851*,
New Haven and London, 2009, p.1055, no.8.

Exhibited: London, Royal Academy, 1822, 'Model for a statue of a bowler, to be carved in marble', no.1024

This previously unknown sculpture is a version of Henry Rossi's celebrated depiction of a cricketer now in the collection of the Duke of Bedford at Woburn Abbey. *A Bowler*, along with its pair, *A Cricketer*, have long been regarded as the most significant early marmoreal depictions of the sport. This is only the second version of this iconic sculpture that seems to have survived and was possibly acquired by the great nineteenth-century cricketer – and saviour of Lord's cricket ground – William Ward, who is recorded as having owned versions

¹ PROB 11/2097/111, Will of William Ward of No 14 Wyndham Place, Bryanston Square, 1849, 'I give and bequeath to my said son Henry Ward my two marble cricketing figures or statues'.

of Rossi's statues.² Beyond their status as precocious records of Regency cricket, the sculptures point to a fascinating moment in European neo-classicism, when British sculptors in particular were casting modern sportsman as heroic classical athletes. Rossi's statues are not portraits but idealised figures, and as such they point to a contemporary desire to find antique virtues in modernity.

Henry Rossi was the son of the celebrated sculptor and Royal Academician John Charles Rossi. He joined the Royal Academy Schools in 1811 and was awarded a silver medal by the Society of Arts in 1815. In 1818 he is recorded sharing a studio with his father in Lisson Grove, but set up independently in 1820. Rossi, in common with other sculptors, struggled to find work in Britain following the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1817 Rossi's father reported to the diarist Joseph Farington that he 'had formed a plan to go to America in hope of obtaining employment there. He sd. He had been witht. employment or nearly so, for the last two years'.³ Rossi senior's lack of adequate work had even prompted him to consider travelling to Haiti to work for the King, Henri Christophe.⁴ Henry Rossi exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy but evidently struggled to find consistent employment. By 1820 Farington reports that the architect Sir John Soane and sculptor Francis Chantrey had petitioned Sir Charles Long to appoint Rossi a Clerk at Chelsea Hospital with an annual income of £100.⁵ Henry Rossi's financial struggles seem not to have dented his productivity and he exhibited a steady stream of ambitious work at the Royal Academy from 1817.

In 1819 Rossi showed his 'model for a statue of a bowler' and 'model for a statue of a cricketer'.⁶ These were presumably the preparatory studies for Rossi's sculptures of bowler and batter. Rossi went on to show 'statue, in marble, of a Cricketer' at the Royal Academy in 1822, along with a further 'Model for a stature of a bowler, to be carved in marble'.⁷ It is highly unlikely that Rossi would have shown the same model twice, so it raises the possibility that he modified his figure of a bowler.

Rossi's *Bowler* is shown with his weight on his right leg and right shoulder angled back, in a moment of intense concentration just before he begins his bowling action; the bowler's taut physicality is underscored by his fixed countenance. Rossi was evidently inspired by the so-called Apoxyomenos, a Roman copy of a Greek sculpture which in its most famous form at this date had been restored as a boxer and was in the collection of Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne.⁸ Rossi's figure is modishly dressed, wearing his own close cut, curled hair, a high collared shirt and tight-fitting short jacket; he has a sash at his waist and ribbons at the bottom of the legs of his breeches. It is clear Rossi specifically conceived the figure as a modern Roman patrician engaged in the thoroughly modern adversarial pursuit

² It was Robin Simon who first made the link between Ward's sculpture and Rossi's Cricketers. See Robin Simon and Alastair Smart, *The Art of Cricket*, London, 1983, pp.99-100.

³ Ed. Kathryn Cave, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, New Haven and London, 1984, vol.XIV, p.5021.

⁴ Ed. Kathryn Cave, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, New Haven and London, 1984, vol.XIV, p.4869.

⁵ Ed. Kathryn Cave, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, New Haven and London, 1984, vol.XVI, p.5624.

⁶ In the 1819 catalogue the sculptures are listed as: 1182 'Model for a statue of a cricketer – H. Rossi'; 1183 'Model for a statue of a bowler – H. Rossi.'

⁷ In the 1822 catalogue the sculptures are listed as: 1100 'Statue, in marble, of a Cricketer – H. Rossi'; 1024 'Model for a statue of a bowler, to be carved in marble – H. Rossi.'

⁸ See Elizabeth Angelicoussis, *Reconstructing the Lansdown Collection of Classical Marbles*, Munich, 2017, vol. II, pp.39-43.

of cricket. Finely carved in white marble, the statue is an impressive, compact work of Regency sculpture.

The rediscovery of *The Bowler* does raise some questions, not least the chronology of Rossi's sculpture and the relationship between this statue and the version at Woburn Abbey. Rossi appears not to have shown his *Bowler* in marble at the Royal Academy but, as noted above, he did exhibit two plaster models. At least one plaster survives, a damaged figure of *The Bowler* in the collection of the National Trust at Stourhead in Wilshire. It is unclear when or how the marble versions entered the collection at Woburn, it has always been assumed that they were purchased by John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford, but they do not appear in *Outline Engravings and Descriptions of the Woburn Abbey Marbles* published in 1822, nor has any reference to their acquisition been found in the vouchers of the 6th Duke.⁹ It may be that they were neither commissioned – as has been assumed – nor specifically purchased by the duke. A letter from Rossi to Sir John Soane in 1829 stated that he planned to raffle his *Cricketers* and that there were to be 40 tickets at 5 guineas raises the possibility that they were acquired as an act of charity.¹⁰ Rossi clearly retained casts of the figures because in 1837 he offered 'my only remaining casts of the *Cricketers* the *Bowler* and the *Batter*' to the Merchant Taylors Company.¹¹

At least one marble set of Rossi's *Cricketers* belonged to the banker and philanthropist William Ward. Elected a director of the Bank of England, Ward was a noted amateur cricketer. A prominent right-handed batsman and an occasional slow lob bowler, Ward scored 278 for the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) versus Norfolk at Lord's in 1820, which remained the highest individual innings in first-class cricket until 1876. In 1825 Ward stepped in to acquire Thomas Lord's cricket ground, which he was selling off for development, and this generous act ensured Ward is remembered as one of the great benefactors of the sport. Ward's versions of Rossi's sculptures appear at least twice in James Pycroft's early writing on cricket. In his pioneering *The Cricket Field*, Pycroft noted in a passage on batting:

All good players stand easy, and hold the bat lightly, yet firmly, in their hands. However rigid your muscles, you must relax them before they can start into action – Rossi, the sculptor, made a beautiful marble statue of a batsman at guard, for the late Mr. William Ward, who said, 'You are no cricketer, Mr Sculptor; the wrists are too rigid, and hands too much clenched.'¹²

In his biography of Ward Pycroft, specifically mentioned that 'once he had a beautiful marble statue of a "cricketer in play" made by the sculptor Rossi'.¹³ This might imply that Ward only owned a version of the *Cricketer*, but we can be pretty sure Ward had versions of

⁹ I am extremely grateful to Matthew Hirst, curator of Woburn Abbey, for help with provenance research.

¹⁰ London, Sir John Soane's Museum, Archive, Soane Private Correspondence, II R 8/7-9.

¹¹ The figures were acquired by the Merchant Taylors Company but destroyed during the Second World War. See Ingrid Roscoe, *A Biographical Dictionary of Sculptors in Britain 1660-1851*, New Haven and London, 2009, pp.1054-55.

¹² James Pycroft, *The Cricket-Field or the History and the Science of the Game of Cricket*, London, 1862, p.116.

¹³ Frederick Lillywhite, *Cricket Scores and Biographies*, London, 1862, I, p.361.

both *The Bowler* and *Cricketer*. In Ward's Will he specifically left to his son Henry Ward 'my two marble cricketing figures or statues'.¹⁴

Pycroft's anecdote about Ward and Rossi is telling and it does seem plausible that Ward commissioned *The Bowler* and *Cricketer* from Rossi, perhaps after seeing the models at the Royal Academy in 1819 or 1822. In fact, all the documented early owners of versions of Rossi's sculptures in both plaster and marble can be closely connected. The Stourhead plaster was probably acquired by Henry Hoare, son of Richard Colt Hoare, who was a member of the MCC and appeared in several high-level cricket matches in 1823 and 1824. Some years later the 6th Duke of Bedford's son, Lord Charles Russell, played for the MCC, becoming President in 1835. This suggests that at least two sets of marble Cricketers by Rossi – and a plaster – were acquired by leading figures at the MCC in the years around 1825. It in turn seems likely that this recently rediscovered version of Rossi's *Bowler* was one of the pair that belonged to William Ward and which he left to his son in 1849.

Rossi's conceit, depicting a modern sportsman in the monumental language of antiquity, represented an important shift in sculpture. It was an idea most spectacularly emulated by his own father, John Charles Rossi, who produced the *British Pugilist*, a sculpture almost two metres in height, for George Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont, in 1828. The innovative nature of these works was appreciated by contemporaries, and an article in *The Literary Gazette* published in 1831 specifically noted, 'Subjects in common life – such, for instance as the cricketer... have frequently been invested by Mr Rossi with the dignified simplicity of the antique.'¹⁵

¹⁴ PROB 11/2097/111, Will of William Ward of No 14 Wyndham Place, Bryanston Square, 1849.

¹⁵ *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, London, 1831, p.379.