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The Death of Dirce



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The fine, Grade II listed, sculpture at the end of the avenue opposite the great drawing room carries the inscription “Death of Dirce. Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge, Bart, 1908”.

It depicts a story from Greek mythology. Dirce, daughter of the Sun god, Helios, was the second wife of Lycus, King of Thebes. Her persecution of Antiope, the King’s first wife, incited Antiope’s twin sons, Amphion and Zethus, to avenge their mother by binding Dirce to a wild bull. The original, and famous, depiction of this event is The Farnese Bull, a marble grouping carved in the 3rd century that

was unearthed in Rome in 1546. Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge created a bronze version of his work in 1906, which greets visitors to Tate Britain.

Eugen Sandow, the man many consider to be the “father of modern bodybuilding”, organised the first ever bodybuilding competition at the Royal Albert Hall in 1901 (“The Great Competition”; pictured below). The three judges were Sandow himself, Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. The winner, William Murray, was used by Sir Charles as his model for the twins.

The statue was set-up in its present position after Sir Charles’ death, in accordance with his wishes.

The avenue was laid out in its present form in the first decade of the 20th century, on the line of an earlier avenue. The hedging is backed in the main by mature conifers, with several giant redwoods (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) and Lawson cypresses (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*).

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The Great Competition

