

ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744)



Sculptor, Attrib. Prince Hoare. Marble. (35 x16.6 x 14 cms.) 18th Century.

Alexander Pope, poet and satirist, was well known in 18th century Bath. He associated with the highest achievers in literary and artistic society, many of whom became his friends, at least until they crossed him in some way when they would be pilloried in his writings. Perhaps his volatility was due to pain from his physical affliction of severe spinal disease, causing him to have a 'humped back' which limited his adult height to no more than four feet six inches.

He came to Bath on many occasions seeking a cure, or at least some pain relief, and he became well acquainted with Ralph Allen. Pope would stay, sometimes for months at a time, at Prior Park and undoubtedly entertained, with his acerbic wit, the many distinguished people who visited the Allens. A man of considerable artistic ability, he helped Allen with the layout of the landscaped gardens at Prior Park and collected, locally, many fossils and interesting minerals for the celebrated grotto at his own home in Twickenham. In 1743 there was the almost inevitable falling out with Mrs. Allen but Mr. Allen remained a friend until Pope's death a few months later. Pope also fell out with William Pulteney, Earl of Bath, and wrote extremely rude pieces about the Countess of Bath.

The bust reveals Pope's finely boned face although, when compared with other images, his nose seems a little less sharp and pointed than as usually depicted. The piece has been attributed to Prince Hoare, the brother of William Hoare, one of Bath's best loved portrait artists. Recent work, by a local historian, reveals that this attribution rests solely upon its purchase in an antique shop in Walcot in 1919 by a Mr. Lane, whose widow gave it to the Gallery in 1925. The more recent opinion is that it may relate to much larger busts by Roubiliac, perhaps as a preparatory piece or a scaled down studio copy but who actually carved it is, as yet, unconfirmed.