

WATERFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Maria Pope (1775-1803)

Actress

Maria Anne Pope (nee Campion) was born in Waterford to a merchant family who hailed from Cork in 1775. Sadly, tragedy struck three years later when Maria's father died, leaving her and her mother and sister destitute. Through her mother's pleading with a man named Hitchcock, Maria became a member of the Crow Street theatre troupe.

Her debut was in the role of *Monimia* in Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* in February 1790. Her first appearance on the Dublin stage was noted for her fainting during the performance, most likely as a result of nerves. However, this did not deter her for playing many of the lead female roles in the plays of Shakespeare. In the beginning of 1793 she joined the theatre company of Frederick Jones, and performed across the main cities in Ireland. In 1795 she moved to England, and performed under the stage name 'Mrs. Spenser' throughout Yorkshire, making her debut on the London stage two years later, reprising the role of *Monimia* to much critical acclaim.

She married Alexander Pope (and had a son, who died in infancy, and one daughter), an Irish actor, and performed at Convent Garden in a variety of roles from serious plays to comedies. In 1801, she briefly performed the role of *Juliet* at Drury Lane. Unfortunately, in June 1803, Maria took ill during a performance of Shakespeare *Othello* (playing *Desdemona*) and a week later suffered a stroke. Her remains are interred in Westminster Abbey.

Cian Manning