



HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

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‘Queen Anne by the seaside: Sir Jacob Bancks, Francis Bird and the Minehead Commission (1715)’

At least twenty statues of Queen Anne were erected during the early decades of the 18th century, the most impressive being the sculpture of Anne surrounded by four allegorical figures carved by the leading sculptor of the day, Francis Bird (1667-1731), for the West front of St. Paul’s Cathedral. This work provides a useful starting point for thinking about public sculpture of Queen Anne, in which we can read it as a central work in a wider narrative about the significant meanings and agenda sculpture of Anne took on during the final years of her reign. This paper purposefully shifts its critical focus away from London to the provinces, and focuses instead on a commission given to Bird by Sir Jacob Bancks, MP for Minehead. The Minehead statue of Anne has received no critical attention, and this paper will explore some initial findings on this work, chiefly by explaining how a statue by a leading sculptor ended up in a Minehead town square developed by the Victorians, and why Jacob Bancks, a man about whom little is known biographically, would seek to commission such a work. In addressing these points, I will show how this specific commission was conceived to further both the personal and political ambitions of its commissioner, Bancks, in addition to the wider national and religious policies of church and state.