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A RARE PORTRAIT OF THE ARCHITECT AND TOWN PLANNER OF BATH, JOHN WOOD THE ELDER (1704–54)

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John Wood the elder, one of the greatest architects working in Georgian Britain, was responsible for some of its finest architecture from that period. His name is synonymous with major parts of Bath, such as Queen Square (Fig. 1) and the magnificent Circus (formerly The King's Circus) (Fig. 2), the latter comprising 30 houses arranged in three equal segments of ten about a circle with a diameter of 318 feet.¹

The mid eighteenth-century carved wooden bust, measuring 27in. in height, and depicted in Fig. 3, is one of only two recorded portraits of the builder of Georgian Bath. Apart from one (oil on canvas) 'conversation piece' in which apparently Wood appears alongside a number of his contemporaries, but in a depiction that is undistinguished and probably somewhat flattering, no other portrait has come to light that can with any

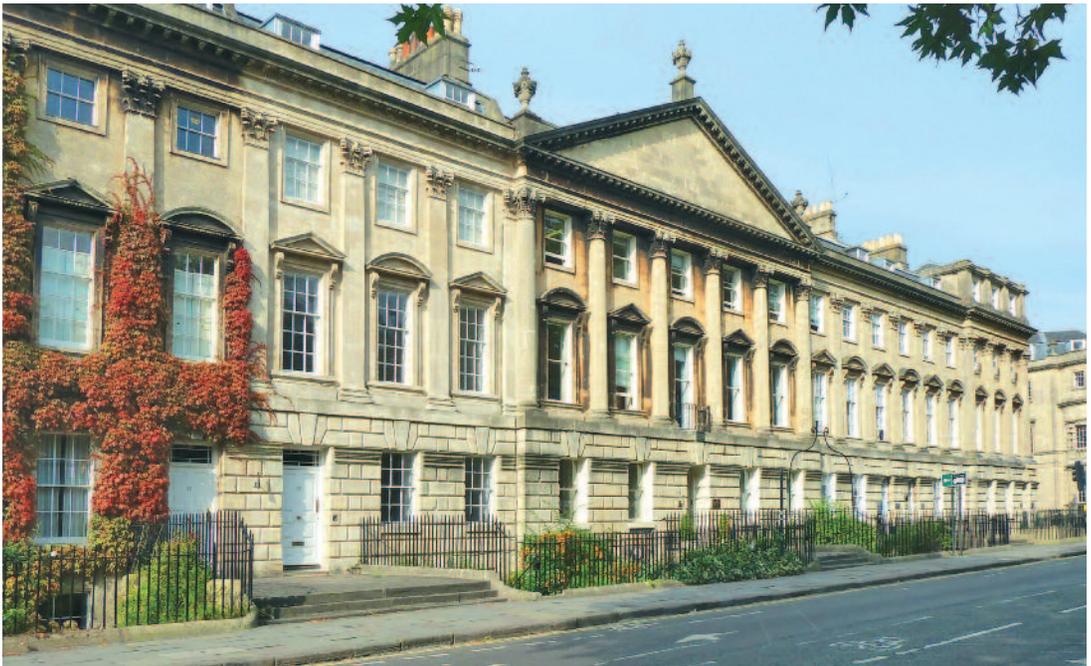


Fig. 1. Queen Square, Bath (north front). (Photo: the author)



Fig. 2 The Circus, Bath. (Photo: the author)

reasonable degree of assurance be identified as Wood. This bust therefore is of great significance in the iconography of this celebrated architect and town planner.

The bust in fig. 3 is carved from softwood, probably pine. It has been painted black/bronze on a stone-coloured ground. It is possible that the black/bronze paint was applied sometime in the nineteenth century at the height of the Victorian mania for dark wood furniture, or even in the late eighteenth century.² The bust comprises two parts, the bust proper and the socle (base), which latter incorporates in its verso a panel bearing an inscription of the sitter's name and age and the date of the bust (Fig. 4). The two parts of the bust have been joined together tightly, something that was done before the

bust was painted in its original stone colour. One area of the join can be seen in Fig. 5, at a point where the socle meets the bust adjacent to the underside of the drapery. The process of carving is evident all over the bust, where the chisel marks and grain of the wood can be observed even under the layers of paint (Fig. 6). The date of 1767 inscribed on the verso of the bust and the age of the sitter, which is given as 49 (Fig. 7), may at first seem troubling.

John Wood the elder died in May 1754. Accordingly, if the date on the bust (1767) represents its date of carving – and there is no reason to doubt it – the age given then for the sitter might imply another 'John Wood', rather than the famous architect. It could not, however, represent his son John (also an architect who completed his late

father's unfinished projects, and executed several very significant projects of his own in Bath³), since in 1767 the younger John Wood (Bapt. 25 February 1728 (new style) – 1781) was then aged 39.⁴ The answer to this mystery lies in the wooden bust itself, and in a record of the elder John Wood's physical

appearance apparently made in 1751, less than three years before his death.

First, however, it is necessary to address John Wood's dates of birth and death. He died on 23 May 1754 at his town house in Queen Square, Bath. It is known from parish records that he was baptised on



Fig. 3. John Wood the elder (1704–54), carved wood bust, inscribed and dated on verso, 'I. WOOD', 'Aged 49', '1767'. Height 27 in. (Private Collection. Photo: the author)



Fig. 4. Verso of bust of John Wood the elder, 1767, as in Fig. 1. (Photo: the author)



Fig. 5. Bust of John Wood, 1767, as in Fig. 1, detail.
(Photo: the author)



Fig. 6. Bust of John Wood, 1767, as in Fig. 1, detail.
(Photo: the author)

26 August 1704 at St James’s Church, Bath. Baptism would have occurred relatively soon after birth, given very high rates of infant mortality. Almost certainly John Wood the elder was born in July or August 1704, making him 49 at death. This analysis is supported by the architect’s obituary in the *Bath Journal* on 27 May 1754, which recorded:

‘Last Thursday Morning, about Three o’clock, died after a long and tedious illness, in the fiftieth Year of his Age, John Wood Esq. . . . celebrated for his Designs, Plans and Skills in Architecture: more particularly in this, and a neighbouring City, the second great Mercantile Trading City of this Kingdom.’⁵

Had Wood been at least 50 at his death, he would have been described as in his fifty-first year. The remainder of the obituary notice is deeply personal in tone, suggesting it must have been drafted by a

close relative, possibly his son John, who must be taken to have known the age of his father.⁶

Wood the elder’s age at death being established as 49, and, as the bust according to the inscription it bears represents a sitter aged 49, how do we account for the date of 1767 also inscribed on it, which can safely be assumed as the year the bust was carved? A close examination of the bust itself provides the answer to this conundrum. The face itself is not carved from the life, either by being derived from a model in clay made from sittings given by the subject, or carved directly from observation of the subject, but is based on a face mask that must have been cast in a mould taken off the face immediately or very shortly after the subject’s death. The face in the bust is both very frontal and very immobile. It captures nothing of the liveliness that is typical in



Fig. 7. Verso of bust of John Wood the elder, 1767, as in Fig. 1, detail. (Photo: the author)

busts of living subjects, whether modelled in clay from sittings given by the subject to the sculptor, or carved in marble and based on a prior clay (or plaster) model.

Some of the finest sculptors of the eighteenth century were adept at producing lifelike busts of sitters even if the faces were taken from death masks. One famous example is Joseph Nollekens RA (1737–1823), whose great posthumous bust of the independent MP Sir George Savile (1784, Victoria and Albert Museum) was so derived, but nevertheless captures the naturalism of the politician's facial features, and has been praised for the 'pensiveness and spiritual suffering [that] left their mark on the tender, manly features'.⁷ Nollekens was, however, the greatest portrait bust specialist of the last three decades of the eighteenth-century and

the first decade or so of the nineteenth century, a genre in which 'he was without a rival', his busts being 'of the first rank'.⁸ He would have been eminently capable of refashioning the features to produce the lifelike effect he wanted to achieve.⁹ When the bust of Savile is compared to the present bust of Wood, the distinction and skill of the sculptor of the former stand in stark contrast with the lesser ability exhibited by the carver of the bust of John Wood. The latter might have been a carver of objects such as ships' figureheads at the nearby commercial seaport of Bristol, many of which by that time were made from softwoods, often pine.

Other leading sculptors working in Britain in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, such as Michael Rysbrack (1694–1770) and Louis François Roubiliac (1702–1762), occasionally incorporated face masks in the clay models for their marble portrait busts, as was the case of the former's busts of the six-year old Edward Salter¹⁰ and the six- or seven-year old John Barnerd,¹¹ and the latter's bust of the composer George Frideric Handel.¹² In all three cases, however, the resulting busts (both the finished marbles and earlier fired clay models) exhibit the vitality of the sitter because the face mask was taken from a living person.

The same is not so with the face on the present wooden bust, derived from a death mask whose whereabouts are unknown. It is not known who carved the bust, but he is unlikely to have been more than an averagely competent carver in wood, since, despite the inscriptions on the verso, the sculptor had not considered it desirable or necessary to include his own name; and the carving is, in many respects, competent, if not outstanding. The hair is an attempt at representing the wig that John Wood would have worn in public in daily life, but it is stiff and formulaic. It has the appearance of an accoutrement that has been added to make the composition whole. The same might also be said for the stock, coat and waistcoat in which the subject is clothed – all quite detailed but lacking any sense of



Fig. 8. Bust of John Wood, 1767, as in Fig. 1, detail.
(Photo: the author)

spontaneity; and the very modest drapery seeming to envelop the bust is no more than a hint of the classical drapery in which many sitters were depicted in busts of them made in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹³

The present bust has little of ‘the play of curve against curve’¹⁴ in the area of the cheeks that is a feature of the mobile and living face so typical of eighteenth-century *ad vivum* portrait busts produced in Britain by the finest sculptors. The face is expressionless, the lips are firmly closed – adding to the static sense of the bust – and the eyes cannot have been modelled from direct observation of a living individual: they too are formulaic and appear to be an afterthought. The eye-lids would have been closed following death and during the making of the mould for the death mask, and it would have been

necessary for the carver to ‘create’ the missing eyes. The eyes are small (Fig. 8), doubtless reflecting the small eye sockets in the face mask. There are no ears, or even ear lobes, the manufactured wig serving as a convenient prop to obscure even the smallest reference to those appendages, which in any event are unlikely to have formed part of the death mask (Fig. 9).

There is, however, an extraordinary attempt by the carver to reflect all the small pock marks and other vicissitudes of life that had left their mark on the face of Wood during his lifetime, as if the carver has faithfully followed in every detail a precise pattern of these as reflected in the death mask (such as on the nose), thus eschewing impressionistic representation for verisimilitude. Much of the detail of these many flaws in the subject’s visage has been



Fig. 9. Bust of John Wood, 1767, as in Fig. 1, detail.
(Photo: the author)

partly obscured by the black/bronze paint. As with earlier times, the eighteenth century was ‘a world persecuted and marked by smallpox’ and by ‘Tetter, Ringworm...scurf, pimples and Pitts’ or ‘the gummata...caused by syphilis or smallpox [or] more probably brought about by the universally used mercurial wash, which was supposed to improve the complexion but generally eroded it’; indeed, ‘there was no relief from scorbutic countenance. Complexions continued to be scarred, sallow and spotted’.¹⁵ The carver’s precision in faithfully representing these flaws, the immobile nature of the face (with its firmly closed mouth), the lack of any representation of ears or parts of ears, and the eyes – which are clearly an idea rather than an attempt at verisimilitude – together demonstrate that the face was carved by reference to a death mask.

In many respects the head of the wooden bust is not dissimilar to the head of the standing figure on the viewer’s right in the group composition, c.1735, entitled (from a pencil inscription on the verso) ‘The Four Bath Worthies’ and at one time attributed to William Hoare of Bath RA (c.1707–92). It portrays (left to right) Richard Jones (standing), Ralph Allen and Robert Gay seated, with John Wood the elder standing (Fig. 10). Jones was clerk of works to Allen. In 1735 Wood had begun the large Palladian mansion of Prior Park, Bath, for the entrepreneur and philanthropist, Ralph Allen (1693–1764), notable for his reforms to the postal system.¹⁶ Owing to disputes between owner and architect, completion of Prior Park was entrusted by Allen to Jones, whose alterations to the east wing destroyed the symmetry of Wood’s design. Allen was, nevertheless, active in



Fig. 10. *The Four Bath Worthies*, being (viewer's l to r) Richard Jones, standing, Ralph Allen and Robert Gay seated, with John Wood the elder standing, c.1735, painter unknown. Oil on canvas, 112.5 cm x 137.5 cm.
(© Bath in Time - Bath Preservation Trust)

supporting Wood's successful campaign to be appointed architect for the new exchange in Bristol (1741–3) (Fig. 11), arguably, according to Andor Gomme, 'Wood's finest architectural composition and one of the most distinguished examples of English Palladianism. Its success led Bristol's great rival, Liverpool, to commission Wood in 1749 to design a combined exchange and town hall, a further development of the same scheme'.¹⁷

There is a close correlation between the philtrum of both the face on the bust and the figure depicted

standing in the viewer's right of the painting, said to be John Wood the elder. There is, however, a difference in the shape of the nose,¹⁸ which is marginally more prominent in the bust than in the painted portrait; but we are justified in not placing too much store by the painted portrait as a definitive representation of the features of John Wood the elder. The picture is a slight work and its earlier attribution to William Hoare of Bath is now not accepted.¹⁹ A comparison of the portrait of Ralph Allen in this minor conversation piece when compared to his



Fig. 11. Bristol Exchange. (Photo: the author)

famous portrait by Thomas Hudson, 1754 (Fig. 12), shows marked differences both in the physiognomy of the sitter and in the quality of execution of the work. The same can also be said of William Hoare's well-known three-quarter length portrait of Ralph Allen, commissioned in 1758 for the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital,²⁰ both latter pictures showing, for example, a more prominent nose than is depicted in the earlier painting, 'The Four Bath Worthies'.

An attempt to flatter the sitters (perhaps especially John Wood) was also quite likely given,

the tendency for eighteenth-century painters to play down the less than prepossessing features of their sitters. Roubiliac's monument to Admiral Sir Peter Warren (Westminster Abbey, 1757) incorporates the sculptor's marble bust of Warren. The Admiral's face, on the bust on the monument and on a marble replica (once in the family's possession and now at the Huntington Art Gallery in California) is heavily scarred, but, as David Bindman and Malcolm Baker point out, this feature 'is not apparent in [Thomas] Hudson's portrait of the admiral painted around



Fig. 12. *Ralph Allen* by J. Faber, after Thomas Hudson, 1754, mezzotint. 38.8 x 27.6 cm.
(© Trustees of the British Museum)

1747'.²¹ As late as the end of the eighteenth century, painters (unlike some sculptors) continued to shy away from too much realism in their portraits. In his Diary for 2 January 1798, Joseph Farington recorded a comment by the painter Robert Smirke on a marble portrait bust by Joseph Nollekens (signed and dated 1793; collection: the Earl of Leicester, Holkham Hall) of the politician William Windham (1750–1810):

‘Smirke...condemned Nollekens for expressing marks of small pox in bust of Windham’.²² The lack of portraits of John Wood the elder (save for the now unattributed painting and the present wooden bust that in any case was derived from a death mask and was posthumous) perhaps indicates reluctance on Wood’s part to sit to artists because of his less than appealing complexion.

We are, however, very helpfully advised as to John Wood the elder's facial features by the records of the Ugly Face Club of Liverpool, a sociable society for men of which he appears to have been a member, presumably having joined while engaged on the project for the Liverpool Exchange and Town Hall.²³ The Club – its proper title 'The Most Honourable and Facetious Society of Ugly Faces' – appears to have existed for some eleven years from 1743 to 1754, or that is the period for which extant records once existed and were reproduced in a book in 1912. The membership comprised merchants, medical doctors and a doctor of divinity, several ships' captains and some leading tradesmen.²⁴ The primary qualification for membership (Rule 2) appears to have been that the candidate had 'something odd, remarkable, droll or out of the way in his Phiz; as in the length, breadth, or narrowness thereof, or in his complexion, the cast of his eyes, the make of his mouth, lips, chin, &c.'. While the rules of the Club (Rule 1) appear at first sight to exclude from membership anyone who was not a bachelor, in practice that rule does not appear to have been observed strictly (or regularly), and another Rule (11) provided that that when a member married he would pay a fine to the club of 10s. 6d. Marriage was not an automatic ground for removal from membership of the club,²⁵ and there is abundant evidence that unmarried members subsequently marrying continued in membership so long as they paid the fine.²⁶ Indeed the 'rule' against the admission of married men was more a ploy designed to extract fines as a method of funding the club than a prohibition on the admission of men who had wives. The club financed itself by one-off donations, the winnings from lotteries, fees charged for dinners, fines paid on the marriage of a member (which seem to have been levied frequently), and a forfeit of 3d paid by each member who failed to attend any of the regular meetings of the club that were held 'every other Monday', although travelling members were 'not to pay but to be obliged to meet when in

Town'.²⁷ Crucially, and the accounts support the point, members did not have to pay a subscription on joining the club.

An entry in the club records dated 22 July 1751 referred to a member, John Wood 'of Liverpool, Architect' and described his qualification for membership as:

'A stone colour'd Complexion. A Dimple in his Attick Story. The Pilasters of his face fluted, Tortoise ey'd, a prominent Nose, Wild Grin, a face altogether resembling a badger, and finer tho' smaller, than Sir Chrishr Wren or Inigo Jones's.'

Hitherto it has been assumed by commentators on the Woods, father and son, that this is a reference to John Wood the younger,²⁸ probably because it is known that Wood the elder agreed 'to leave his son Mr John Wood at Liverpoole during the summer seasons to superintend and carry on the said building'²⁹ of the Liverpool Exchange, and that a house in Liverpool was rented in the name of John Wood between 1750 and 1753.³⁰ It might also have been assumed that because of these arrangements, and because of Wood the elder's chronic ill-health, he never visited Liverpool after the original arrangements for his engagement as architect were agreed. Wood the elder's frequently recorded absence through ill-health from meetings of the Bristol Corporation's committee overseeing the building of their Exchange,³¹ might indicate his (lack of) willingness or ability to travel to Liverpool, a considerably greater distance from Bath than Bristol. The assumption that the description in the Ugly Face Club records related to John Wood the younger and the probable reasons for it specified above, are, however, all open to serious questioning; and there is evidence from the Club's financial accounts (presumably not analysed and certainly not discussed by any earlier commentator³²) that John Wood the elder and his son John were both members of the Club.

It is unsafe to place too much reliance on the description of John Wood 'of Liverpool, Architect' to

support the contention that the club's records in 1751 refer to Wood the younger. Both Woods, elder and younger, had been made Freemen of the City of Liverpool, on 5 and 10 July 1749, respectively, more than two months before the first stone of the new Exchange was laid on 14 September that year.³³ Why should not a Freeman of the city be described as 'of Liverpool', even if he was not generally resident in the city? On that basis, the 1751 description in the Ugly Face Club records could apply to either Wood the elder or his son. But when both were given the Freedom of the city, only Wood the elder was recorded as an 'Architect', his son being described in the resolution as 'Gentleman'. Presumably this reflected John Wood the elder's own statement to Sarah Clayton in June 1749 (relayed to Alderman Shaw, a member of the Corporation's committee 'to select a plan for the new Exchange') that his son 'may be very capable to carry his father's scheme into execution, though not as yet equal to the scheme himself.'³⁴

As for the frequency with which Wood the elder visited Liverpool, it can be assumed that he was not in the city often or for long periods. He indicated that this would be the case to Sarah Clayton before the commission to design the new Exchange and Town Hall was awarded to him.³⁵ But it may be going too far to say that his absences from meetings in Bristol at the committee overseeing his new Exchange there, ostensibly on the grounds of ill-health,³⁶ were a precursor to his lack of presence in Liverpool in the early 1750s. While there is no real doubt that Wood suffered from asthma, which periodically disabled him,³⁷ there is also evidence that his absences from Bristol were less to do with ill-health and more a ruse to avoid contact with Captain Edward Foy, the Corporation's own clerk of works, who opposed Wood from the outset, often unjustly alleging incompetence by Wood; his attitude and behaviour were such as to cause Wood on one occasion to report to the city Chamberlain that Wood's workmen in Bath would rather starve than

go to Bristol to work on the Exchange.³⁸ Given that Wood's son – whom he was clearly training to succeed him – would be in Liverpool for the greater part of several years, it seems likely that Wood the elder would have made periodic visits to Liverpool to see him and to inspect the works on the Exchange he had designed and for which he, not his son, was the architect. On such occasions doubtless he lodged with his son in the house rented for him. That there was such an expectation of visits to Liverpool is clear from the Liverpool Corporation's minutes – 'whenever the said Mr Wood shall come to Liverpoole to direct the carrying on the said building, his travelling charges are to be paid by the Corporation.'³⁹ On 3 August 1749, for example, £60 was paid to Wood the elder for 'His exps. when at Liverpoole'.⁴⁰

Given the absence of any member-joining subscription for the Ugly Face Club, it seems curious that the accounts record a payment from John Wood of 10s 6d on 22 July 1751 for his 'Admission',⁴¹ the only such entry in the accounts re-printed in the 1912 book for the years 1744–54. It seems possible to explain this only as a forfeit required on account of John Wood's existing marital status, since the amount is the same as the fine paid by any member who married after joining the club, and the extant accounts disclose no other types of fine levied in that amount. On that basis, the John Wood in question could not be John Wood the younger, as he did not marry until 1752.

A 'J. Wood' is listed as a member of the club in 1752, but John Wood was not listed in the club's records as a member in 1753 (there is no list for 1754), and for the years 1744 to 1749 there is no reference to him in the records, save that in 1748 one 'J. Woods' is listed as a member.⁴² This cannot be the same John Wood (who was admitted a member in 1751), and it seems unlikely that it is John Wood the younger, since he would not have been in Liverpool in 1748. In any case, that John Woods does not appear in the records in 1749 (to the extent they are accurately and fully



Fig. 13. 'The Tortoise from George Withers', *Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne, etc.*, 1635.
(© The British Library Board, shelfmark C.70.h.5.)

reproduced in the text of 1912). There is (at least in the book of 1912) no list of the members for 1750 and 1751 (although other records of the club and the accounts for July 1751 record the membership of a John Wood). However, the accounts of the club for 1752 record that on 25 September a fine of 10s. 6d. was paid in respect of the marriage of 'Mr Jno.

Wood'.⁴³ This obviously cannot be John Wood the elder, but might relate to his son, also John Wood.⁴⁴ Given there is no reference to a John Wood in the list of members for 1753 as printed in the 1912 book, the absence from the book of a list of members for 1750 and 1751 makes it difficult to identify precisely when John Wood the younger became a member, there being no other references to a John Wood in the records and accounts printed in the 1912 book beyond those already mentioned above. Perhaps his membership lapsed after his marriage in 1752. Given the analysis above of the entry in the accounts for 22 July 1751, John Wood the elder can have been a member for only a year or two. The same may also be the case for his son.

There must be some possibility that the John Wood referred to in the club's records is someone entirely different from the Bath architect.⁴⁵ The extant records and accounts, as printed in the 1912 book, are clearly fragmentary, indeed as recognised by the editor, 'very scanty', and 'even in this MS many pages are missing, whether by accident or design is open to conjecture', as the editor recognised.⁴⁶ However, the Woods, father and son, were both granted the Freedom of Liverpool in July 1749, and there might therefore be nothing out of the ordinary for them both to be admitted to the same social club (indeed, being father and son they are likely to have shared similar physical traits, viz. facial features, thus both meeting the qualifications for membership to the extent that these were a serious requirement). There certainly were other members of the club who were related to each other, such as the Messrs Parr, father and son.

The 1751 description of John Wood in the records of the Club is clearly loaded with architectural terminology, implying that the member himself supplied the wording. If that were so, the comparison of Wood's features with those of Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723, an architect whose name would clearly have been in the public consciousness in the early 1750s) and Inigo Jones

(1573–1652),⁴⁷ which has the effect of placing John Wood within the same canon of architects as those earlier illustrious masters, exhibits a degree of confidence in the writer that suggest he recognised the importance of the contribution he had already made to English architecture and town planning. Wood the younger had gained his first practical experience of surveying on a field trip to Stonehenge with his father in 1740 when he was only 13,⁴⁸ and over the coming decade or more he grew in confidence and began to execute his own designs for buildings.⁴⁹ But it must be doubtful whether, in 1751, John Wood the younger, still in the shadow of his father, would have possessed the hubris to imply a comparison of his own talents and achievements with Christopher Wren and Inigo Jones. Wood the elder clearly had a facility with words – both as a prolific author (between 1742 and 1751) of publications on his ‘bizarre and wildly unscholarly fantasies on the origins of classical architecture’,⁵⁰ and in his occasionally ‘heavy and ungenerous jocularity’ at the reputations of his contemporaries and competitors.⁵¹ His description of the suicide of his lodger – a rather dubious gentlewoman whom he called Sylvia – and his personal response to that tragedy⁵² demonstrate that not only was he very literate but also that he could write powerfully descriptive passages full of emotion and simile. In contrast, his son John has been described as ‘desperately solemn’ and ‘sensitive’ and it has been stated that his membership of the Ugly Face Club (if indeed he was a member) was ‘his only recorded comic gesture’.⁵³ That itself might imply that his joining the Club was at the behest of his father, himself a member.

There are certain aspects of the description of John Wood’s ‘Phiz’ in the 1751 records of the Liverpool Ugly Face Club that bear a remarkably close similarity to the face in the wooden bust, which cannot represent John Wood the younger, since it is dated 1767 and incorporates a feature (the face) derived from a death mask; Wood the younger died

in 1781.⁵⁴ The ‘Dimple in his Attick Story’, presumably a reference to a dimple in the forehead, is very clearly seen in the face in the wooden bust; the nose in the bust is undoubtedly prominent; and the face in the bust arguably does, indeed, resemble that of a badger. The ‘Tortoise ey’d’ appearance may also be important. It is known that Wood the elder must have possessed a copy of *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne*, published in 1635 and put together by the ‘third-rate Caroline poet’⁵⁵ George Wither. This was a book of illustrations originally executed by members of the Dutch Van de Passe family more than twenty years earlier to which Wither merely added lines of doggerel. One illustration (p. 86) was of a tortoise, which Wither supplemented with verse (Fig. 13).

Not only did Wood the elder appropriate aspects of Wither’s coat of arms (as they appeared in a portrait of the poet incorporated in the book) to his own unofficial arms,⁵⁶ but some of the 525 pictorial emblems (with alternating triglyphs) on the frieze of the Doric entablature on The Circus in Bath are derived from this publication, including, most probably, the tortoise that appears as the eighth emblem on the south-east segment of The Circus commencing at the Bennett Street corner.⁵⁷ It is not known what the description ‘Tortoise ey’d’ signified to its writer, but perhaps it was an allusion to small dark eyes – Wood the elder clearly had small eyes.

The bust is unusual in being carved in wood, rather than the usual white marble in which most eighteenth-century busts were carved, such as the 1761 fine marble bust of Bath’s Master of Ceremonies, Beau Nash (1674–1762) by Prince Hoare the elder (1711–61), and the same sculptor’s marble bust of Ralph Allen.⁵⁸ The decision to carve the bust in wood may have been a deliberate pun on the name of the subject, as much as a reflection of the desire to avoid the substantial cost of having the architect’s features memorialised by the dignity of marble more than a decade after his death. In the same way, the reference in the minutes of the Ugly Face Club to

John Wood having a complexion the colour of stone is not without significance to a discussion the present wooden bust. While undoubtedly carved by reference to a death mask of the architect, the intended recipient of the bust, quite possibly Wood's son John, would certainly have been aware of that feature of his father, and may have decided to have the bust painted in a stone colour to reflect it, that base colour later being painted over with a black/bronze paint. The stone colour resembles the distinctive honey-coloured Bath stone out of which were constructed the façades of many now famous buildings for which John Wood the elder was the architect.

1767, the date inscribed on the verso of the bust, marks the commencement by Wood the younger of work on the Royal Crescent, the culmination of 'the most dramatically impressive piece of picturesque townscape in Georgian England.'⁵⁹ Could the commencement of work on the Crescent have provided the impetus for the portrait bust of his father?

There is another factor to be considered. Wood the elder had married (probably early in 1727) Jane (or Jenney) Chivers, the daughter of one of the Duke of Chandos's lodging housekeepers.⁶⁰ They had three sons and at least three daughters. Only the eldest son, John, followed his father's profession, the second becoming a clothier and the third dying young. John Wood the elder's wife died in 1766.⁶¹ The widow appears to have left no Will, but that is unsurprising since she probably owned little property of her own with any real monetary value, the interests which she inherited from her late husband automatically passing on her death to children of the marriage under the provisions of John Wood the elder's own Will.⁶² It seems likely that amongst her possessions was a death mask of her late husband, which had been made possibly to fulfil a number of functions, at least one of them commemorative. It may also have been made as a prelude to the intended making of a portrait bust that

was never executed in the widow's lifetime. There is abundant evidence of the practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of preserving for posterity the faces of famous or important deceased persons by the making of face masks upon their deaths.⁶³

The emergence of the death mask among the personal effects of John Wood the elder's widow following her death in 1766 probably led to the decision of a family member to have the bust carved, thus accounting for its completion by the following year, as testified by its inscribed date of 1767. It accurately records the subject's age as 49 – John Wood the elder was 49 at the date of his death, when the face mask was made.

John Wood the elder is buried along with his son John (and possibly Wood the elder's widow) under a simple black stone slab in the north aisle of the church of St Mary the Virgin, Swainswick, Somerset, which merely bears the words 'Joannis Wood *Armigeri Sepulchrum*'.⁶⁴ The present wooden bust of John Wood the elder might usefully serve as the model for a long-overdue monument in Bath to the man who did more than any other to give the city its dignity and charm.⁶⁵

ENDNOTES

1. The Circus was commenced by Wood and completed by his son, the architect John Wood the younger. On John Wood the elder and his architecture, his deep interest in Celtic prehistory and his bizarre theories on the origins of classical architecture, see T. Mowl and B. Earnshaw, *John Wood: Architect of Obsession* (Bath: Millstream, 1988, hereafter Mowl and Earnshaw), *passim*, and A. Gomme, 'Wood, John (Bap. 1704. d 1754), architect and town planner', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004, vol. 60, pp. 112–4, hereafter Gomme). Wood's enduring legacy to town planning and architecture in Bath and elsewhere was eloquently summarised in 1927 by the then President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, Walter Tapper (in his Foreword to T. Sturge Cotterell, *John Wood: The Architect of*

- Eighteenth Century Bath*, Corporation of Bath, 1927), and more recently in 2004 by Gomme (at p. 114). See also Michael Forsyth, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Bath* (New Haven and London), 2003.
2. One of the most prolific makers of portrait busts in the eighteenth century, John Cheere, drew on a range of conventional images of figures such as Cicero, and on models (often in classical style) of contemporary literary greats, such as Alexander Pope, based on the celebrated marble bust by Louis François Roubiliac (1702–62). Cheere achieved a dominant position in the market by the middle of the eighteenth century with his large workshop near Hyde Park producing prodigious quantities of plaster busts, which were considerably cheaper and quicker to produce than marble or bronze busts. The plaster busts were often ‘bronzed’, by being varnished with copper dust, to create the appearance of a work in bronze. On John Cheere, see, e.g., T. Friedman and T. Clifford, *The Man at Hyde Park Corner – Sculpture by John Cheere – 1709–1787* (Leeds, 1974). On ‘bronzing’, see also M. G. Sullivan, ‘Brass sculpture and the ideology of bronze in Britain 1660–1851’, *Sculpture Journal*, Vol. XIV (2005), pp. 30–40, at p. 39.
 3. He began his work as an assistant to his father. Among his works which survive today are the Royal Crescent and Bath Assembly Rooms. He also finished the King’s Circus, which was designed by his father and completed in the 1760s.
 4. The date of 1767 in the inscription caused confusion when the bust was auctioned at Sotheby’s in London on 10 May 1996, leading the auctioneer to assume the bust was of John Wood the younger, and that his father had been only 13 when the son was born: *The Tristram Jellinek Collection*, Sotheby’s, London, 9 and 10 May, 1996, lot 647.
 5. Quoted by W. Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bath from 1700 to 1830*, 1948, reprinted with a foreword by Michael Forsyth (Reading, 2004), p. 33, and by Mowl and Earnshaw, p. 209. C. E. Brownell, *John Wood the Elder and John Wood the Younger: architects of Bath*, unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1976 (copy in Courtauld Institute Library, hereafter Brownell), p. 11, n. 1, also cites other authorities in support of John Wood the elder’s age as 49 at his death. The suggestion by Kirsten Elliott, *The myth maker: John Wood, 1704–1754* (Bath: Akeman Press, 2004, hereafter Elliott), p. 43, that John Wood the elder might have been born in 1703, has no foundation. Wood the elder seems to have suffered from chronic ill-health, something that may have affected his complexion. Wood has been described as ‘always, with his leg-cramps, asthma and chest infections’: Mowl and Earnshaw, p. 209, and see pp. 158–9, 164.
 6. Elliott, p. 63, has described the obituary as possibly ‘an angry outburst from a son who felt his father’s genius had been neglected’ by the citizens of Bath.
 7. Marjorie Trusted, *The Return of the Gods: Neoclassical Sculpture in Britain* (Tate, London, 2008, exh. cat.), p. 29, no. 17.
 8. M. Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain 1530–1830* (Harmondsworth, 1964, hereafter Whinney), pp. 157, 161.
 9. Even Nollekens, having employed a death mask in the facture of the bust, could not always guarantee success in making a deceased person look lively (and sometimes appear as if they were merely asleep): J. Gage, ‘Busts and Identity’ in P. Curtis, P. Funnell and N. Kalinsky, eds., *Return to Life: A new Look at the Portrait Bust* (Leeds, 2000, ex. cat., hereafter *Return to Life*), p. 39, with reference to the deceased politician Charles James Fox from whom Nollekens intended to take a death mask in 1806.
 10. G. Balderston, ‘The Genesis of Edward Salter Aetatis 6’, *Georgian Group Journal*, Vol. X (2000), pp. 175–205.
 11. Christie’s, *Important European furniture, sculpture and carpets*, 7 July 2005, London, lot 420.
 12. D. Wilson, ‘By Heaven Inspired’: A marble bust of Handel by Roubiliac rediscovered’, *The British Art Journal*, Vol. X, No. 1 [Spring/Summer 2009], pp. 14 to 29.
 13. See, for example, the many busts illustrated in *Return to Life*.
 14. Whinney, p. 86 (written in relation to an *ad vivum* bust by Michael Rysbrack from the early 1720s).
 15. M. Angeloglou, *A History of Make-up* (London, 1970), pp. 72, 73, 77.
 16. On Prior Park, see Mowl and Earnshaw, Chapter 7, pp. 101–18. With the wealth gained from his postal reforms, Allen then made another fortune by acquiring the local quarries that supplied the distinctive honey-coloured Bath Stone used by Wood and other architects to build the Georgian city.
 17. Gomme, p. 113.
 18. Wood’s features will also have changed with the passage of time – some 19 years if the picture’s dating to 1735 is accepted.

19. The painting's attribution to William Hoare (made in David Gadd, *Georgian Summer: Bath in the Eighteenth Century*, Adams and Dart, 1971, pl. 17, when the painting was in a private collection; it was inadvertently attributed to 'Thomas Hoare RA') and repeated in James Lees-Milne, 'Ralph Allen at Prior Park', *Apollo*, November 1973, vol. xcvi, no. 141, p. 366, is no longer accepted. The painting, which was sold at Bonhams, London 6 May 1976, lot 56, did not appear in Evelyn Newby's monograph on Hoare (*William Hoare of Bath R.A., 1707-1792*, ex. cat., Bath Museums Service: Alan Sutton, 1990, hereafter Newby) and it is not given to Hoare in its current ownership by the Bath Preservation Trust: see T. Mowl, ed., *Obsession: John Wood and the Creation of Georgian Bath*, exh. cat. for exhibition of the same title at The Building of Bath Museum, (Bath 2004-5, hereafter *Obsession*), pp. 74-5, cat. 16. The painting's authorship is unknown.
20. Newby, p. 31, cat. 14.
21. D. Bindman and M. Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth Century Monument: Sculpture as Theatre* (New Haven and London, 1995), p. 319.
22. K. Cave (ed), *The Diary of Joseph Farington* (New Haven and London, 1978-1984), vol. 3, p. 961.
23. Described as 'the greatest public building of the 18th century in Liverpool': Richard Pollard and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Lancashire: Liverpool and the South West* (New Haven and London, 2006), p. 45.
24. E. Howell, Ed., *Ye Ugly Face Clubb, Leverpoole 1743-1753: a Verbatim Reprint from the Original MS in the Collection of the Late Joseph Mayer, Esq., of Bebington, Cheshire* (Liverpool, 1912, hereafter Howell), p. 12.
25. As erroneously suggested by the editor of the *Liverpool Mercury*, in Howell, p. 12.
26. Howell, pp. 29, 41, 59, 70 and 71, which demonstrate that the longstanding member George Mercer, a founder member, who married in April 1750 and paid the fine, continued to be a member until at least 1753. The membership of John Brancker, who had married in May 1744 and paid a fine to the club of 10s. 6d. on 7 May, continued until around 1751 when he seems to have died: *ibid.*, pp. 53, 60, 65-9. William Pickering paid the marriage fine in 1744 and retained membership throughout the period for which records of the club are recorded in the 1912 book.
27. Howell, pp. 16-17.
28. See, for example, S. A. Harris, 'Sarah Clayton's letter and John Wood of Bath', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 100 (1948), pp. 55-72 (hereafter Transactions) at p. 59, n. 3; Mowl and Earnshaw, p. 204; H. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, 3rd ed. (New Haven and London, 1995, hereafter Colvin), p. 1075.
29. J. A. Picton, *City of Liverpool. Municipal Archives and Records, etc.* (Liverpool, 1886, hereafter Picton), p. 159, as quoted by Colvin, p. 1075.
30. The reference to the rented house is given in Colvin, p. 1075; and in Transactions, p. 59, n. 3, it is stated that Wood the younger resided mostly in Liverpool between 1750 and 1754. I have found no source to corroborate either statement, but it seems likely that the Woods did rent a property during the period of the building of the Exchange and Town Hall, where Wood the younger lived when supervising the building and where his father could lodge when he visited Liverpool from time to time, as probably he did.
31. Mowl and Earnshaw, pp. 158-9
32. Even Brownell, p. 117, merely cites the reference to the Ugly Face Club as it appears in Transactions, but (like Transactions) includes no discussion of the records and accounts themselves.
33. Picton, p. 159; Transactions, p. 62, n. 2. .
34. Transactions, pp. 59-60.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
36. Mowl and Earnshaw, pp. 158-9.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-9, 169.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 155, and see pp. 154, 159.
39. Picton, p. 159.
40. Transactions, p. 62, n. 2.
41. Howell, p. 60.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 65- 69, 70-1. We cannot discount the possibility in the 1912 book of errors in transcription of the manuscript records.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
44. The fine was paid by Wood to the Club more than six months after his marriage. While in Liverpool Wood the younger he met his future wife, Elisabeth, who was the sister of Chester's town clerk, Thomas Brock. According to Parish Registers, the couple were married on 1 March 1752, at Whitegate, Cheshire (presumably at the Anglican church of St Mary).
45. The record from 1751 refers to the John Wood as being an architect 'of Liverpool', although I have been unable to find any evidence of such a person.

46. Howell, pp. 9 and 15.
47. 'Wood's architectural hero figure and exemplar was Inigo Jones': Mowl and Earnshaw, p. 197 and *passim*.
48. Mowl and Earnshaw, p. 169.
49. *Ibid.*, Chapter 11, pp. 169–78.
50. Gomme, p. 113. See, for example, Wood's *An Essay Towards a description of the City of Bath*, published in 1742–3.
51. Mowl and Earnshaw, p. 51.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–6
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 204–5.
54. Gomme, p. 114. There is no known portrait of John Wood the younger. A portrait (of which there are other versions in the Liverpool Museums collection and the Axbridge Town Trust at Axbridge Town Hall) that was once in the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution and at one time thought possibly to be John Wood the younger (*Journal of the Royal Institution of British Architects*, Vol. 46, no. 11 [1938–9], p. 536, 'Wood of Bath') is in fact a copy of the portrait of the amateur architect and politician Thomas Prowse MP (c.1708–67) of the grade II* listed Berkley House, Somerset. The listing particulars for that house record a painting (thought to be another version of that depicted in the RIBA Journal) 'believed to be of John Wood of Bath' (<http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-267061-berkeley-house-berkeley-somerset> – accessed June 2013). But Prowse's own portrait, paired with that of his wife, Elizabeth, both by Thomas Gainsborough RA, was sold at Christie's, South Kensington, *Old Master and British Pictures*, 29 October 2008, lot 137, and it is clear that the man depicted by Gainsborough is the same man depicted in the painting reproduced in the RIBA journal and in the painting at Berkley House. I am grateful to Dr Amy Frost, Curator, Beckford's Tower, and Architectural Curator, Bath Preservation Trust, for informing me that the painting reproduced in the RIBA Journal was once in the ownership of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, and for supplying the reference to the Christie's sale in 2008.
55. Mowl and Earnshaw, pp. 200–1.
56. *Ibid.*, and pp. 159–60.
57. See Elliott, pp. 65–6 for a list of sources for some of the other emblems.
58. The bust of Nash was reproduced in *Apollo*, November 1973, Vol. xcvi, no. 141, p. 331, fig. 3. The bust of Ralph Allen was presented to the Royal Mineral Water Hospital by Dr Warburton: Newby, pp. 32–3, Cat. 14b. John Wood's bust being carved from wood and made in the eighteenth-century in England is very unusual, and it is difficult to recall other such busts, although possibly some do exist.
59. Gomme, p. 114.
60. Her name is written as 'Jenney' Wood in an indenture dated 8 October 1754 in which she and her son John are described respectively as 'Executrix of the said John Wood' and 'Son and Heir of the said John Wood Deced.': British Library, Egerton MS 3516, fol. 113. Wood the elder had acted as surveyor of the house being built by James Brydges, first Duke of Chandos, in Cavendish Square, London. In the second half of the 1720s Wood also acted as architect for Chandos in the building of superior lodging houses on the site of the old St John's Hospital in Bath: see Mowl and Earnshaw, p. 39.
61. Gomme, p. 113.
62. See the summary of his Will in Mowl and Earnshaw, p. 209.
63. See, for example, the discussion in *Return to Life*, pp. 38–9; G. Scherf, 'Sculpted Portraits, 1770–1830: 'Real Presences'', in Robert Rosenblum and others, *Citizens and Kings: Portraits in the Age of Revolution, 1760–1830* (Paris and London, 2006–2007), pp. 25–36 at p. 34; and M. Droth, J. Edwards and M. Hatt, eds., *Sculpture Victorious: Art in an Age of Invention, 1837–1901* (New Haven and London, 2014), pp. 342–3.
64. Implying that John Wood the father and his son John (both 'Esquire') were interred in the same vault and under the same slab. The tomb slab is illustrated in *Obsession*, p. 105, fig. 61. In 1807, John Wood the younger's widow, Elisabeth, 'then living in poverty in Richmond, Surrey, appealed to the Bath Corporation for assistance in the name of her husband and her father-in-law, and received an allowance of £20 per year': Brownell, p. 149. Given her financial circumstances, on her own death Elisabeth's remains are unlikely to have been repatriated with those of her late husband and father-in-law.
65. On a proposal for a long-overdue monument in Bath to John Wood the elder, see Mowl and Earnshaw, p. 210.