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# PREHISTORY AND PALLADIAN – JOHN WOOD’S KING’S CIRCUS, BATH

Tim Mowl

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I should like to begin by outlining a series of apparent coincidences associated with the form and dimensions of the King’s Circus at Bath. Viewed from the air, with the shaft of Brock Street linking it to the Crescent, it produces a remarkably unified piece of bold geometrical planning. According to Tobias Smollett, the novelist and essayist, the same architect planned the Circus and projected a Crescent.<sup>1</sup> That can, and sometimes has, been taken as a reference to John Wood the Younger who carried through the actual building of all three streets. But Smollett lived for several years in Bath as a contemporary of the elder Wood whom he greatly admired. In an essay published in 1752, two years before the elder Wood’s death, Smollett spoke of his ‘extraordinary genius’ to which an ungrateful city corporation was ‘indebted for a great part of the trade and beauty of the place’, yet ‘they have industriously opposed his best designs, which, had they been executed, would have rendered *Bath*, in point of elegant architecture, the admiration of the whole World’.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, on 18th February 1754, the elder Wood laid the foundation stone of the Circus. I have stressed Smollett’s remarks as I believe they prove that the elder Wood projected the whole area on Lansdown and not just the Circus; the son was only the supervising builder, though a very faithful and efficient one.

Grimm’s view of the Circus (c.1773) shows it as it looked originally, paved with a central raised reservoir and thirty monolithic hitching posts of an unusually prominent design (Fig. 1). There are thirty front doors opening onto the Circus proper and thirty houses in the Crescent. Wood had made, in 1740, a careful survey of Stonehenge and the prehistoric circles at Stanton Drew, twelve miles outside Bath. According to these he believed that there were thirty uprights originally at Stonehenge and in the eastern circle at Stanton Drew. Both circles were, he declared, on little evidence beyond that of the central crescent of trilithons at Stonehenge, temples of the Moon. The western circle at Stanton Drew was, by his account, a sun temple.

The Circus at Bath has a diameter of 318 feet. By pinching and fudging the physical realities, by counting a possible lost bank of earth and including the width of the stones, Wood was able to give both Stonehenge and the Moon Temple circle at Stanton Drew diameters of 318 feet. His interest in this particular odd dimension was that by his calculations, based on work by Sir Isaac Newton, 318 feet was the modern equivalent of 60 Jewish cubits, and 60 Jewish cubits was, according to the Book of the Prophet Ezra, Chapter 6, the dimension of the second Temple at Jerusalem.

The Circus comprises 648 columns in three above-ground storeys: Doric, Ionic, Corinthian – all of equal height (Fig. 2). This last point is unusual but Wood makes it quite clear in his last architectural book, the *Dissertation on the Orders* of 1751, why the arrangement interested him:

By the Draughts of the Banqueting House at *White Hall* inserted in *Campbell’s Vitruvius Britannicus* as well as in the Book of Designs published by the late Mr. *Cant*, or *Kent*, it appears that *Inigo Jones* intended to give the World a Specimen for placing Columns over Columns of one and the same Altitude . . . and if he had avoided some Things in his Sample, the Harmony of the Orders must, in the Words of Mr. *Campbell*, have produced in the highest

degree, Strength with Politeness, Ornament with Simplicity and Beauty with Majesty.<sup>3</sup>

Wood was essentially a provincial architect, and one notices by his rather tasteless joke about Kent's surname that he felt a certain isolated hostility towards the London establishment of the day. But Inigo Jones, conveniently dead, once an apprentice joiner like himself, and the son, Wood believed, of a Bath mother, was a man he could safely revere. Hence the Circus is of a peculiarly dated Palladianism, an eighteenth century essay in seventeenth century design. A section of Jones's Whitehall from the Kent volume to which Wood referred reveals columns over columns and a circular court.

A sequence of the astonishingly rich range of metopes in the Doric frieze of the Circus from the corner house of that segment where Brock Street leads off to the Crescent contains both a sun symbol and a moon symbol. A coincidence possibly, but the elder Wood was fascinated by the earlier existence of sun and moon temples on this same Landsown hillside, so the coincidence should be borne in mind.

At this point I must pass on a warning. It was given to me in a letter by Howard Colvin when my colleague Brian Earnshaw and I were in the early chapters of our biography of John Wood. Mr. Colvin began:

I think you will need to treat what Stukeley called 'the fabulous whimses' of Wood's 'crackt imagination' with the greatest discretion. Nonsense remains nonsense even if it is over 250 years old, and Wood's ventures into the lunatic fringe are really interesting only in so far as they help to explain his architecture. Otherwise they are of no more value than any other ravings of Jezreelites, Four-Square Gospellers, Long-Straight-Trackers and the like.

When my co-author and I came to consider Wood's achievements in stone and his antiquarian fancies it soon became apparent that what the rival antiquary and Druid-fancier, William Stukeley, had quite fairly described as Wood's 'crackt imagination' was absolutely central to the inspiration of Wood's ambitions and his town-planning. If we avoided offence by skirting Wood's extraordinary systems of belief, we were in danger of writing merely for those readers who react to the eighteenth century with a wholly twentieth century set of conventional responses. I mean by these: the Age of Reason, the Age of Enlightenment, minuets, satin knee breeches, Sheridan's *The Rivals* and a general mocking aloofness to any smack of Enthusiasm. Now Deists and Theists may catch the eye of those who expound the period but, in fact, the eighteenth century was far more solidly a century of untroubled Protestant fundamentalism than the nineteenth century of Darwin and Huxley ever was. Belief in the literal truth of biblical revelation was standard in England in the eighteenth century, not remarked upon because it was so rarely questioned. We note that the lower and middle orders of society were swept into extremes of devotion by Methodism in the 1750s, but the same century had opened with a sudden expansion of Freemasonry to include large sections of the aristocracy, and Freemasonry involved a very close interpretation of the Bible as the revelation of God.

Membership lists for Masonic lodges of the period are inevitably incomplete, but a contemporary French engraving of an English Masonic initiation rite reveals the lodge which met at the Bear in Bath, at that time the Premier Masonic Provincial City of England. Bath's aristocratic members met at the Queen's Head. Fortunately the membership of that lodge, No. 28, is known; it included the Duke of St Albans, who was the Master, the Duke of Bedford, the Earl of Litchfield, Earl Craven, Earl Darnley (Grand Officer of England), Lord Cobham, Lord Hervey and a whole covey of baronets and polite Anglican ministers: an influential group by any standards, at least one of whom was later to be a Wood patron, and all of them initiates of a highly exotic Christian



FIG. 1. The King's Circus at Bath, by S. H. Grimm (Victoria Art Gallery, Bath)



FIG. 2. The King's Circus, Bath

sub-cult.<sup>4</sup>

Freemasonry then stood for a set of beliefs every bit as esoteric as those of the Jezreelites, Four-Square Gospellers and Long-Straight-Trackers against whom Howard Colvin sensibly cautioned us when he warned that Wood's ventures into the lunatic fringe were really only interesting in so far as they help to explain his architecture. The only difference was the rank and influence of its membership. The flamboyant splinter faiths of the Civil War period did not come suddenly to a close in 1700. England remained a devout Protestant society where belief based on biblical interpretation was the norm. However, interpretation was endlessly variable. John Wood was a typical member of that society, a devout Christian and a convinced Freemason who had developed his Masonic beliefs to include the Druidic prehistory of Bath and his native Somerset. The two cults – Freemasonry and Druid-fancying – were not as incompatible as they might appear, being both mystic and speculative, natural outpourings from an age not of historians but of antiquaries. The precise tenets of the two cults we can consider later.

The following quotation may put the matter into a more contemporary perspective. It is taken from an article written for the *Architectural Review*, not in 1783, but in October 1983, by Quinlan Terry. He wrote:

My late partner and mentor Raymond Erith was not a man of orthodox beliefs but he believed very strongly that the essence of classical architecture and the orders in particular were *given* at some point in history – ‘The Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders . . . are so perfect in their proportions and detail and application to the art of building, that they could not have been invented by man. There is, to me, only one satisfactory explanation of their origin and that is that they are *divinely inspired*’.

There followed a full account tracing the development of the orders from Moses to Vitruvius (including a plan of Moses' Tabernacle). Terry ended devoutly:

And so to God only wise be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

So, you may agree, we have at least to be careful before we mock – particularly if, like me, you find Quinlan Terry's new river front for Richmond-on-Thames a delight and a revelation.

It is time to consider John Wood on his arrival back in his native Bath in 1727. His ungrateful city has no authenticated portrait of its second founder, but in a very hamfisted group of Ralph Allen and some cronies, the figure on the right in his black surveyor's coat is probably John Wood (Fig. 3). He looks confident and obsequiously deferential as, no doubt, he had to be because Ralph Allen had used his design for the town house in Liliput Alley but gave another man the job of building it. Bath builders at that period were a tight closed-shop.

Already by 1725 Wood had, through an older friend and business partner James Theobald, made connections with Masonry and with Druidic antiquities. Theobald introduced him to his first three aristocratic patrons, Lord Harley (later 2nd Earl of Oxford and the man for whom Wood was to make his surveys of Stonehenge), Lord Bingley and the Duke of Chandos. Bingley and Chandos were both prominent Freemasons. Theobald had, in January 1727, become Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries, a post recently vacated by William Stukeley, the arch Druid-fancier of England and a man for whom Wood was later to express a profound rivalry.<sup>5</sup>

As is well known, Wood arrived back in Bath, aged only 21, but already brimming with confidence and planning to transform the rather seedy little spa city with a Royal Forum, an Imperial Gymnasium and, what concerns us most and appears to have

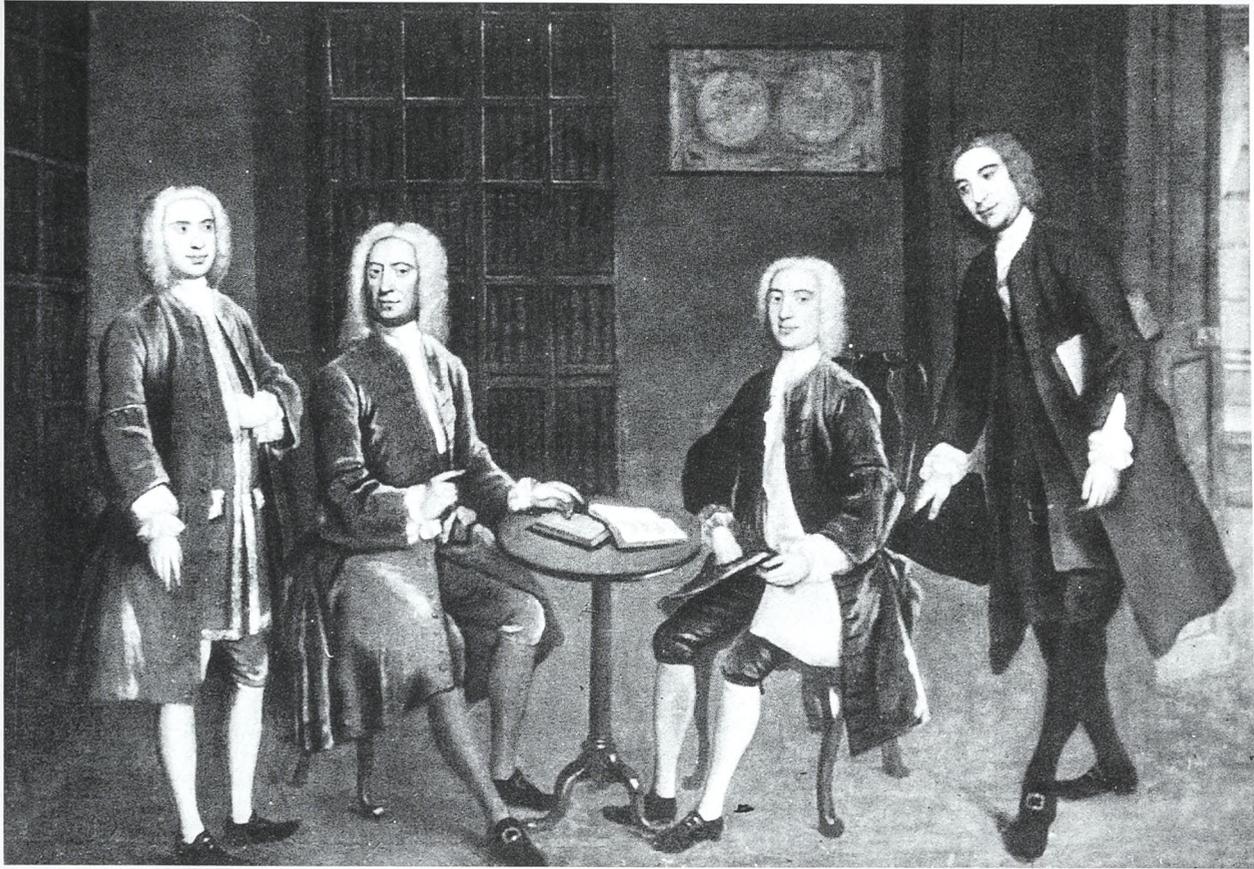


FIG. 3. Portrait group of (from l. to r.) Richard Jones, Ralph Allen, Robert Gray and John Wood (Bath Preservation Trust)

obsessed Wood most, 'a *Grand Circus* . . . for the Exhibition of Sports'. This was, so he wrote in 1742, long after it was first projected, 'from a Work of that Kind, taking its Rise at first in *Bath*, during the Time of the *Roman* Emperors'.<sup>6</sup> One has, however, to be careful of that phrase because, according to Wood's wildly fanciful history of the area, Bath was the Grand Metropolitan City of the British Druids from 863 BC until the Saxon invasions. It was only in Roman occupation for eleven years. Also the Colosseum, which is always assumed to have been Wood's Roman model for the Circus, was an ellipsoid, not a circle, and Wood was very well aware of that fact from Antoine Dezgodetz's *Les Edifices Antiques de Rome* of 1682.

Wood exhibited publicly a plan for a residential Circus in 1730.<sup>7</sup> It was to be built roughly over the site of the present North Parade on the Abbey Orchard. Much smaller than the achieved Circus, only 230 feet in diameter, it clearly had no allusion to Druidic or Jewish dimensions and the three roads feeding into it are not at the points of an equilateral triangle (Fig. 4).

That mystic design was, however, soon in Wood's mind. The apse which he added in 1727-32 to the existing eighteenth century church at Tyberton in Herefordshire with the reredos, or 'altar', as he always described it, was intended as a memorial to Francis Brydges who, by his epitaph and surviving letters, was an Anglican of the old Caroline style, a Herefordshire George Herbert and an uncle of Wood's current patron, the Duke of Chandos.<sup>8</sup> One suspects that the Tyberton connection influenced Wood deeply.

Around Chandos the Masonic connections multiply for the Duke's Chaplain was John Desaguliers, briefly Grand Master of England, and a highly popular lecturer on such Masonic topics as King Solomon's Temple. Desaguliers was a close associate of Sir

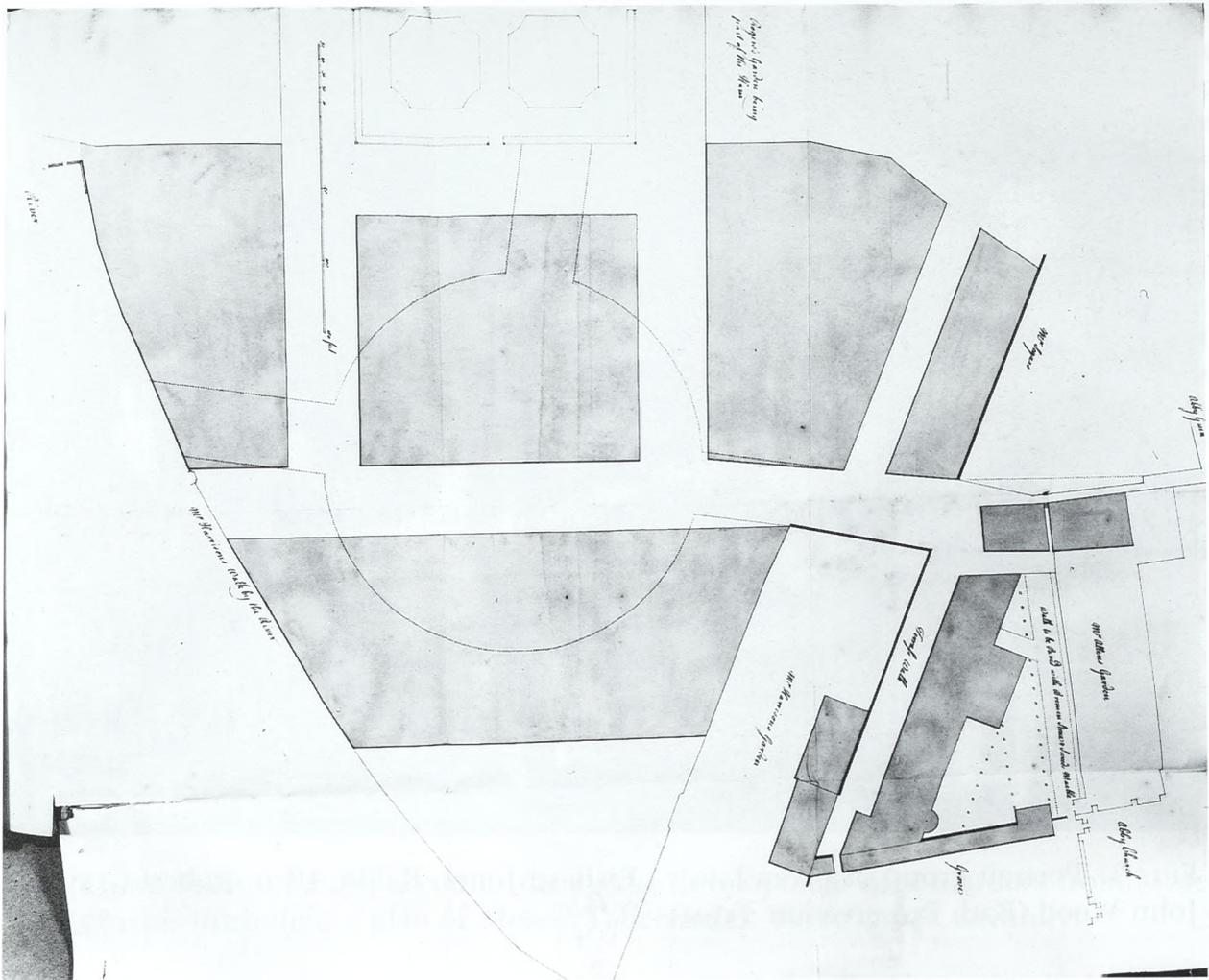


FIG. 4. Circus scheme for the Abbey Orchard (Lord and Lady Manson/Lincolnshire Archives Office: MSS XLIII f.21)

Isaac Newton and the model of the Temple which he used to illustrate his lectures (he lectured in Bath in 1726 and visited a Masonic lodge in the city every year until 1743) was approved by Newton who, incidentally, was fascinated by the subject throughout his life.

The symbolic carving of the Tyberton 'altar' with its emblems of Christ's passion is not typical eighteenth century work. Among the emblems were the cockerel that shamed St Peter and below it, the ear of the servant of the High Priest still sticking to St Peter's sword. Another emblem displays the sun within the serpent (Fig. 5). This appears again later in Wood's work and the whole device was obviously one of real significance to him. The triangle in the circle can be construed as the Trinity in Eternity, or a Masonic compass in the circle it describes, or as Alpha in Omega – the first and the last. Inigo Jones was among many architects who manipulated this gnomonic sign. When James I commissioned a study of Stonehenge from him Jones illustrated the work with a plan showing a circle which was an entirely fictitious bank of earth with entrances at the three mystic points. Its invention suggests how important the symbol was to Jones and his book was handsomely re-issued in 1725, the year of Wood's return to Bath. A plan of Wood's, published in his 1742 *Essay towards a description of Bath*, showed how he wanted the St James Triangle, essentially the site of his lost 1730 Circus, laid out as a garden, again with a proliferation of triangles within a circle.<sup>10</sup>



FIG. 5. Tyberton, Masonic symbol in the apse



FIG. 6. Interior of Llandaff Cathedral in 1828

In addition to these attempts, Wood planned a circular Hospital with a central bath in 1728 and a circular school building for Bath's King Edward Grammar School in 1742. Obviously his Circus was not really intended for the 'Exhibition of Sports'; it was a form of building which he found peculiarly satisfying. Eventually he was able to build the King's Circus only because he was wholly in charge of the process himself. It was an absolute innovation in Britain, and in Europe only the Place des Victoires in Paris with several roads entering a circle at irregular points, can be considered as a possible precedent.

The move from the irregularly placed three roads of his 1730 Circus to the equilateral placing of 1742 suggests that it was between these years that Wood evolved in his Masonic commitment and his feeling for symbolic expression of that commitment. His design of a new cathedral within the Gothic ruins of old Llandaff Cathedral reveals him in a fascinating transitional position between his Romano-Masonic phase and his later Druidic-Masonic convictions. He began work at Llandaff in 1734 and continued as funds allowed until 1749. An engraving shows how Wood fitted a box within the existing choir and first nave bay creating a narrow, aisleless, six-bay structure climaxing in a grand Corinthian tabernacle over the high altar (Fig. 6).

Around 1735, while the rebuilding was in progress, Wood began to write his *Origin of Building*, finally published in 1741, but two manuscript versions of the text survive to illustrate how his antiquarian theories shifted in that period.<sup>11</sup> Wood meant his enclosed classical box to evoke the exact dimensions, and perhaps with its tabernacle even the decoration, of the inner court of that first (not the second) Temple which the architect Hiram built about 1000 BC for King Solomon in Jerusalem. The chronology

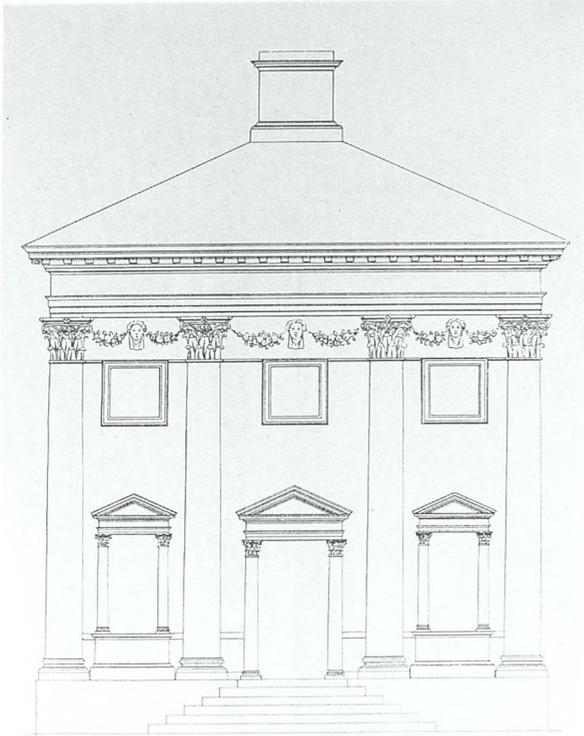


FIG. 7. Corinthian cottage design based on Moses's Tabernacle from the *Origin*

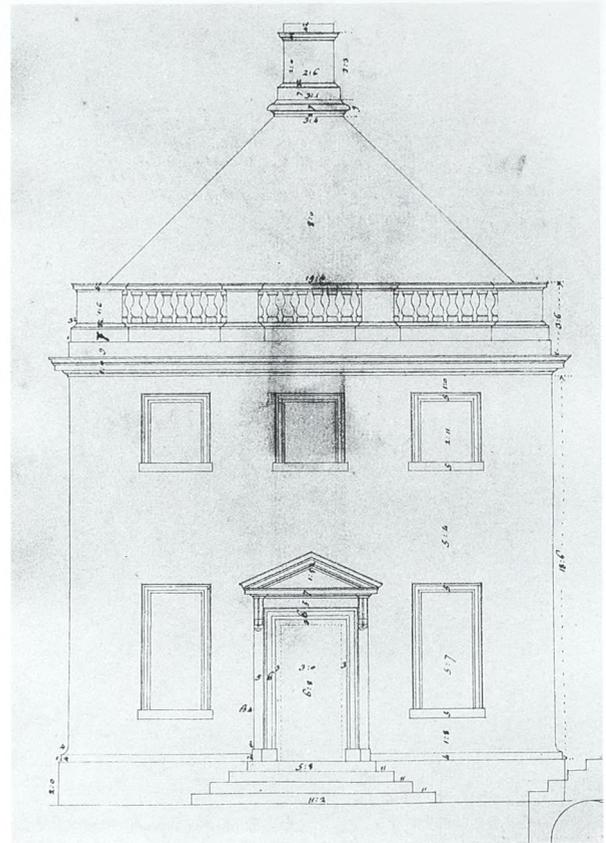


FIG. 8. Design for Jerry Peirce's Lilliput Castle (Bath Reference Library)

was Wood's. Taking a hint from Browne Willis's *Survey of the Cathedral Church at Llandaff*, Wood began by believing that the Norman fragments of the choir were the relics of the oldest cathedral in Britain built by a Celtic King Lucius about 150 AD, during the Roman occupation. Lucius had learned from his Roman masters to use the sacred Jewish measurements of Hiram. Between 1735 and 1741 when the *Origin* was published, Wood adopted a completely different theory.

In a patriotic shift he decided that the Druidic culture of the native Britons had been at least as rich as that of the Roman invaders. This meant that they had no need to learn about Jewish architecture at second hand. Instead Wood came to believe that the prehistoric circles of Stanton Drew, Stonehenge and Avebury were directly modelled on the Temple at Jerusalem. Since Hiram's Temple is very exactly described in the Bible (Ezekiel, Chapters 40-46) and was inescapably rectangular, a link with the equally inescapably circular prehistoric rings of Wessex might seem impossible to forge. To Wood the Antiquary, however, nothing was impossible. At this point a brief summary of Masonic beliefs is unavoidable.

Masons see God as the Great Architect. He revealed his structural predilections first in the dimensions of Noah's Ark, then in the Tabernacle which Moses was ordered by God to build to house the Ark of the Covenant, but most tremendously in the materials and dimensions of Hiram's first Temple for King Solomon. Wood expounds all this in his *Origin of Building*. The Tabernacle fascinated him; he interpreted it as a pyramid upon a cube and, with a grotesque but direct logic, decided that since God had invented it then it would make an ideal villa for gentry, even going so far as to devise two essays in the form – one Doric, one Corinthian (Fig. 7). He reported smugly that the Corinthian

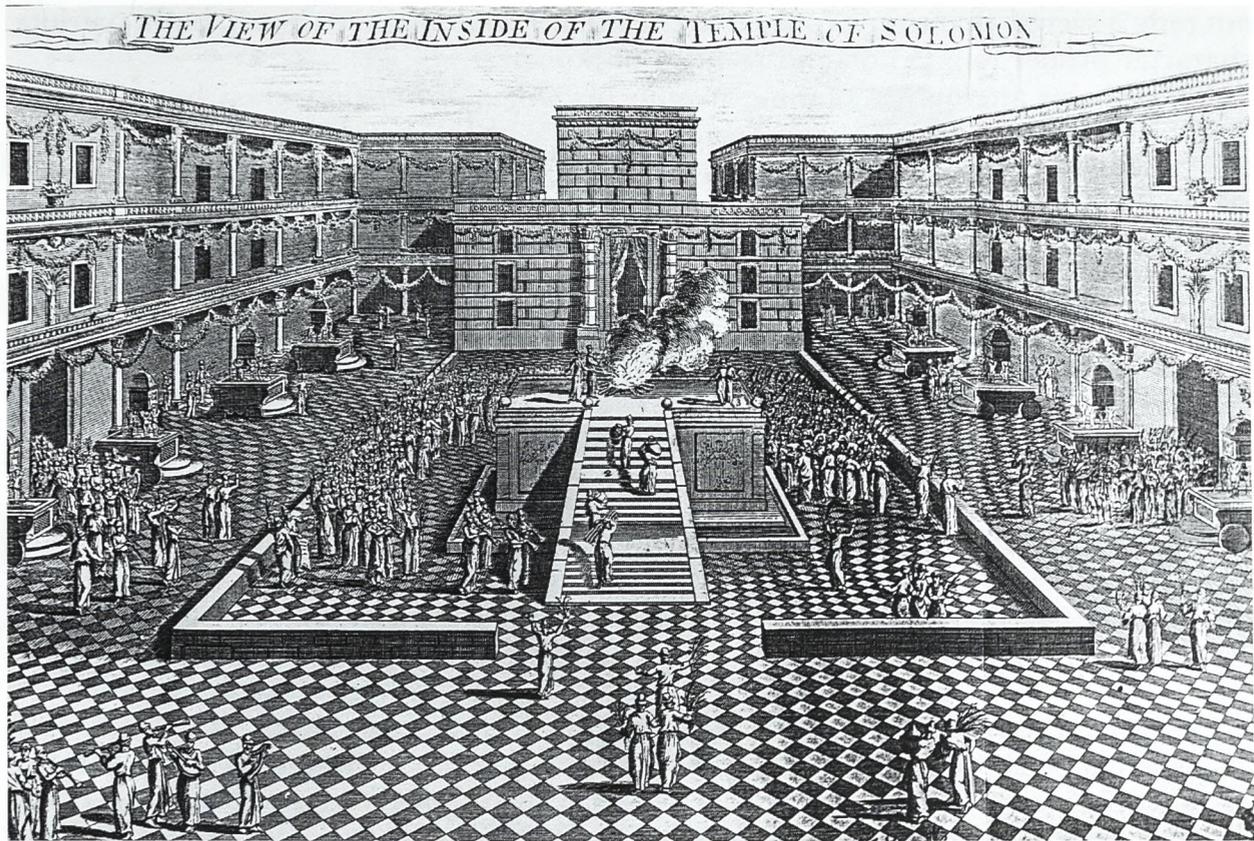


FIG. 9. Interior of Solomon's Temple from Josephus's *Works*

was 'to be executed by the person for whom these designs were first made', so he even had a client for the Tabernacle of Moses.<sup>12</sup> This was a fellow parishioner, the surgeon Jerry Peirce, who wanted a bachelor's love-nest built on a secluded rear slope of Lansdown, at Battlefields (Fig. 8). In the event what was finally put up was a plain version, and even that kept catching fire because of the shoddy design of the chimney flues. Ralph Allen's tomb in Claverton churchyard and three of Wood's minor spa buildings echo the shape.

But to return to the Druid connection with the Temple at Jerusalem. Wood created the link rather cunningly. Hiram's first Temple, the rectangular one, lasted about 500 years and was then destroyed. In 515 BC, according to Wood's chronology and following Isaac Newton, a second Temple was built at Jerusalem by Zerubbabel after the return of the Jews from Babylon. The second Temple is not described in Ezra (Chapters 1 and 6) of the Bible in anything like the exact detail that Ezekiel gave to the first Temple. Virtually all that is known from King Cyrus's decree is:

Let the Foundations thereof be strongly laid, the Height thereof threescore Cubits and the Breadth thereof threescore Cubits.

Everyone else had assumed that this second Temple was modelled on the rectangular first Temple, but not John Wood. Ignoring the inconvenient 60 cubits of height he concentrated on the 60 cubits breadth and assumed, without a shred of evidence, that it was circular with a 60 cubit, or 318 foot, diameter. Perhaps you now begin to see the relevance of Stonehenge and Stanton Drew and why Wood was so anxious to scrape up the 318 foot diameters for both. They would give his crowning work, his King's Circus,

not only a sacred character proper to a Christian Freemasonic architect, but a patriotic character proper to a Briton and resident of Somerset.

Wood was attempting nothing new in his *Origin of Building* when he traced the classical Orders back, not to Greece, but to Israel. The Spanish Jesuit, G. B. Villalpanda had reconstructed Hiram's first Temple in his 1604 *Commentaries on Ezekiel*. Inigo Jones's great scheme for Whitehall Place owed something to Villalpanda with its courts within courts and orders above orders. All three classical Orders were supposed to have been evolved in the construction of Moses' Tabernacle and only perfected in Hiram's first Temple.

A view from an early eighteenth century edition of Josephus's *Works* appears highly relevant to the final form of the King's Circus (Fig. 9). It is a reconstruction of the interior courtyard of Hiram's first Temple. If its columns over columns over columns were reshaped into a circular form and, of course, given a diameter of 60 cubits – 318 feet – then we would have an approximation to the Circus as it was built.

To pick up the Druid theme again, it is surprising how little John Wood actually had to invent for himself. Most of the time he was drawing upon an antique and well-used tradition. John Anderson's *Constitutions of the Freemasons*, published in 1723, has the bare bones of Wood's preferred history with the Greco-Jewish cultural tie-up:

Pythagoras travell'd into Egypt . . . and living there among the Priests 22 Years, became expert in Geometry until he was captured by Cambyses King of Persia, and sent to Babylon, where he was much conversant with the Chaldean MAGI, and the learned Babylonish JEWS, from whom he borrow'd great Knowledge, that rendered him very famous in Greece and Italy; where afterwards he flourish'd and dy'd . . . ten years after Zerubbabel's TEMPLE was finish'd.<sup>13</sup>

The link between the British Druids and the Greeks was equally well established in the Elizabethan surge of English patriotism and in the expansion of this mood during James I's reign to include the new Great Britain. This movement has resulted in much patriotic antiquarian writing. Camden's original *Britannia* of 1586 collected classical source material together with Celtic tradition, but Dr. John Jones's *Bathes of Bathes Aide* of 1572 had already given such pseudo Iron Age chronicles a local Bath slant, establishing King Bladud firmly as the founder of the hot springs.

Michael Drayton's *Poly Olbion, Great Britaine* of 1613 speaks of Druids using Greek letters and being 'proportionat in many things to Cabalistique and Pythagorean doctrine'. In Wood-like tones of patriotism Drayton rimed:

The ancient Britons yet a sceptred king obey'd  
Three hundred yeeres before Rome's great foundations laid  
And had a thousand yeeres an Empire strongly stood  
Ere Caesar to her shores here stem'd the circling flood.<sup>14</sup>

He also picked up Bladud from Dr. Jones and gave him a Greek journey:

As he from learned Greece, that (by the liberall Arts)  
To Stamford, in this Isle, seem'd Athens to transfer;  
Wise Bladud, of her Kings that great Philosopher  
Who found our boyling Bathes: and in his knowledge hie,  
Disdaining human paths, heere practiced to flie.<sup>15</sup>

These lines gave Wood his hero King practically complete, a well-established part of Bath history who already had his statue in the King's Bath with the date of Bladud's

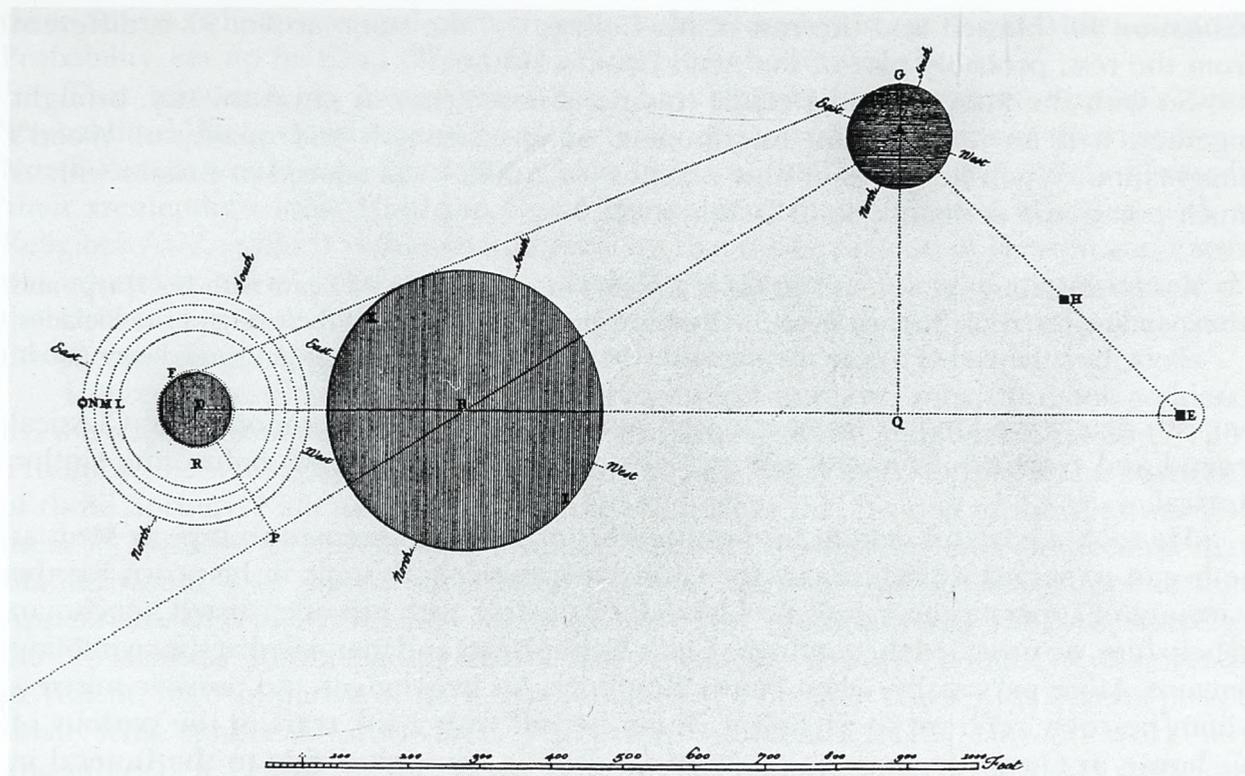


FIG. 10. Plan of the Stanton Drew Circles from Wood's *Essay*

discovery carved below it – 863 BC – all set for Wood to contradict and correct to 483 BC.

There was a great surge of interest in Druids following Edmund Gibson's revised *Britannia* of 1695 with its inclusions of Aubrey's research on Druids. There is an illustration of a Druid in Rowland's 1723 *Mona Antiqua Restaurata*. As a man of the oak trees, he is shown carrying a branch of acorns just like the wild man whom Wood was to put on top of the unofficial heraldic crest which he devised for himself at some time post-1732. The parapet of the Circus, it will be recalled, is topped by acorns.

In 1702 the Irish free thinker John Toland, fluent in three Celtic languages, published his *Critical History of the Celtic Religion*, inventing a new figure Abaris the Hyperborean, Priest of the Sun. That was exactly the character Wood needed for his British-Greek-Israeli-Chaldean link up.

Quite arbitrarily, Wood decided that Abaris and Bladud were one and the same. Prince Bladud/Abaris had travelled to Greece, joined forces with Pythagoras and visited Egypt, Israel and Babylon, absorbing the elements of classical architecture from Zerubbabel's second Temple. He returned to Greece and built the first circular temple to Apollo at Delphi. Then Bladud returned to reign in Bath and build more circular temples. He founded, not Stamford University as Drayton's *Poly Olbion* claimed, but Stanton Drew University.

There he built three stone circles as a demonstration of the Pythagorean theory of a sun-centred universe. Wood made a careful plan of the stones (Fig. 10). Circle A Wood called 'a Duodecastyle Monopterick Temple of the Sun' and Circle D an 'Octostyle Monopterick Temple of the Moon standing in the midst of a Court surrounded with a treble porticoe'. Circle D was the one with a diameter of 318 feet like the King's Circus. In the centre was the large, but dilapidated, circle of the Earth which Wood significantly declared to be not a temple but a circle of houses – an excellent precedent for his long-frustrated Circus in Bath. 'There', he writes, 'some enterprising Druid . . . raised an

habitation for himself and the rest of his College . . . the stone at No. 37 is different from the rest, probably part of the Arch Druid's House'.<sup>16</sup>

So with the Masonic and Druidic traditions neatly, not to say ruthlessly, brought together, it is an apt moment to comment on the strength and quality of Wood's imagination. When he writes of how Belenus (or Apollo) was adored in Britain with as much pomp and ceremony as at Delphi itself.

Apollo attending the Grand Festival at the End of every Cycle of Years with his Harp; and spending his whole Nights, from the Vernal Equinox, in March, to the rising of the Pleiades, about the latter end of *July*, in playing upon that Instrument; and in singing and dancing to it

one can detect the kind of Romantic who perceives the sheer romanticism of Classical legend and responds to it with poetry.<sup>17</sup> He was essentially a Goth before the Gothic Revival.

He took a boastful delight in the thunderstorms which seemed to rage as soon as he began to survey a prehistoric circle and was positively Byronic in his scorn for the warnings of superstitious yokels. In Llandaff Cathedral, with just one trusted henchman to help him, he unsealed the tomb of a Celtic bishop-saint and marvelled at the crumbling remains. More personally, when Fanny Braddock, his lady lodger and possible mistress whom he coyly referred to as 'Sylvia', hung herself with a silk scarf in the parlour of his house in Queen Square, he analysed his frantic homeward ride to the funeral in terms of truly Gothic relish:

the Sun was then Setting . . . the Surprize was so great that every Bush I Galloped by looked like an Infernal Spirit; every Large Stone and Clod of Dirt that lay in the Road appeared like a Hobgoblin; and Stone Walls resembled nothing but Swarms of dreadful Spectres. The Rustling of the Trees, and the Sound of the Horse's Feet filled my Ears with nothing but the Groans and Howlings of People in the utmost Distress.<sup>18</sup>

Though, typically, he seems to have recovered the arrears of rent she owed him by auctioning her possessions for their sentimental value.

Evidently an imagination as suggestible as his could find a temple of the sun or the moon in any convenient heap of stones near Bath. He interpreted a few old lime pit scrapings at Lansdown as 'the Work whereby King *Bladud* and his Colleagues feigned themselves able to raise up all the Deities and Inhabitants of the infernal Mansions in the practice of the art of Necromancy'.<sup>19</sup> Given such a mind one can understand how readily he must have responded to the more blood-chilling mysteries of Masonic initiation with closed coffins, bared left breasts and oaths of torn-out tongues if secrets were ever betrayed.

Bath lacked, superficially, the stony Druid relics of Stanton Drew, but Bath had been Bladud's capital, Stanton Drew a mere university. So Wood applied his creative imagination to the suburban villages and allotments around the city and soon discovered what he wanted. Bladud's palace was on the Ham with a rocking stone or Ambre and a tree of prophecy. The largest hot spring had been dedicated to Apollo-Belenus, the sun god, by a tower of the sun; the two lesser springs had jointly been dedicated to Onca the Phoenician-British moon goddess, also by a tower.

'Now', to use Wood's own words 'in an Augural Line with the hot Waters and Towers thus consecrated to the Sun and Moon and at a Distance of about 3,250 feet from them, as we ascend the Hill now bearing the Name of *Lansdown*, there are three large Stones lying upon the Ground, in a little field by the Side of the Road, known by the Name of *Sols Rocks*, with a Foundation just behind them, shaped into a Circular Form . . . These

three Stones, when erect and perfect, seem to have made a stupendous Altar . . . in all Probability, set up by King *Bladud* for a Temple in honour of the Sun'.<sup>20</sup>

That was enough. Later in his *Essay* any reservations like his 'seem to's' and 'Probabilities' have vanished and he can actually expand on how glorious the view from North Parade would have been when these stones of the 'Temple of Apollo' still stood, 'their tremendous look, from the *Grand Parade*, must have inspired Mankind with a Religious Awe, as often as they should consider that the Great God of Heaven and Earth was adored by them'.<sup>21</sup> So there was, according to Wood, a splendid round temple of the Druids' sun god, Bel-Belin-Belenus-Apollo, up on Lansdown, rather higher than the present King's Circus.

Interestingly, when Wood came to search for the Temple of *Onca*, the moon goddess, he was clearly consciously contradicting an existing Bath antiquarian theory. 'Tho' Tradition', he writes, 'as well as the Modern Writers, place her Temple to the Eastward of those Springs, I am nevertheless inclined to believe that it stood to the Westward of them'.<sup>22</sup> With his preference for a more romantically satisfying site, he decided that *Bladud* would have placed 'such other Priests as were destined to watch for the first Appearance of *Onca*, or the new Moon on top of the Mountain that was consecrated to her'.<sup>23</sup> This was Mount *Badon* (*Bad Onca*) or Lansdown. Sure enough, he discovered in *Walcot*, his own parish of Bath, 'the Remains of a *Circular Work*' with 'several pits or small semi spherical Concavities'. He wrote confidently, 'This *Circular Work* was undoubtedly a Temple of the Moon; and the Pits seem to have been Altars sunk into the ground for the Purpose of sacrificing to that Luminary when she disappeared towards the Change'.<sup>24</sup>

So the great circular or crescent temples had risen on the hill north of Bath, and by Wood's vision and dogged determination they should rise again as they had done when the pacific and far-sighted Roman general *Agricola* had called back the Druids to rule their Metropolitan City undisturbed for another 400 years until the invasion of the Saxons finally ended *Druid Bath*.

One has to accept that Wood must, at some important level, have believed the poetic nonsense which he wrote. What matters is that he believed it enough to want to create it, and there can be few conclusions to a life of effort and frustration more satisfying than his laying of the foundation stone for the Circus, his Sun or Moon (was he ever quite sure himself?) Temple refounded as thirty upper-middle-class homes in heavily symbolic and rather old-fashioned Palladian style. As he wheezed with his chronic asthma in that damp February I wonder did he, like *Browning's* bishop, urge his son not to stint the Doric frieze?

For the Doric frieze of the King's Circus was to be the final John Wood gesture; mysterious, allusive, comical and obscure. It has been described as representing the contemporary arts and sciences. It can now be confidently stated that it does nothing of the kind, but exactly what it does represent is likely to be obscure for ever. The metopes of the frieze allude directly to a metaphysical emblem book of the previous century, *Inigo Jones's* century, and to a parlour game of chance and prophecy, a circular parlour game to be precise.

The game may be examined in the last pages of a book written by *George Wither*. The book, called simply *Emblemes*, was published in 1635. It consists of four parts, each part with about fifty pages. On the game page you spun the arrow on the bottom dial and it would direct you to one of the four parts (Fig. 11). Then you spun on the upper dial and the arrow would point you to a particular page. Each page had an emblem and thirty lines of doggerel poetry. The emblem and the poem was your fortune for that day. This was a daring little performance for a Puritan like *Wither* to invent, close indeed

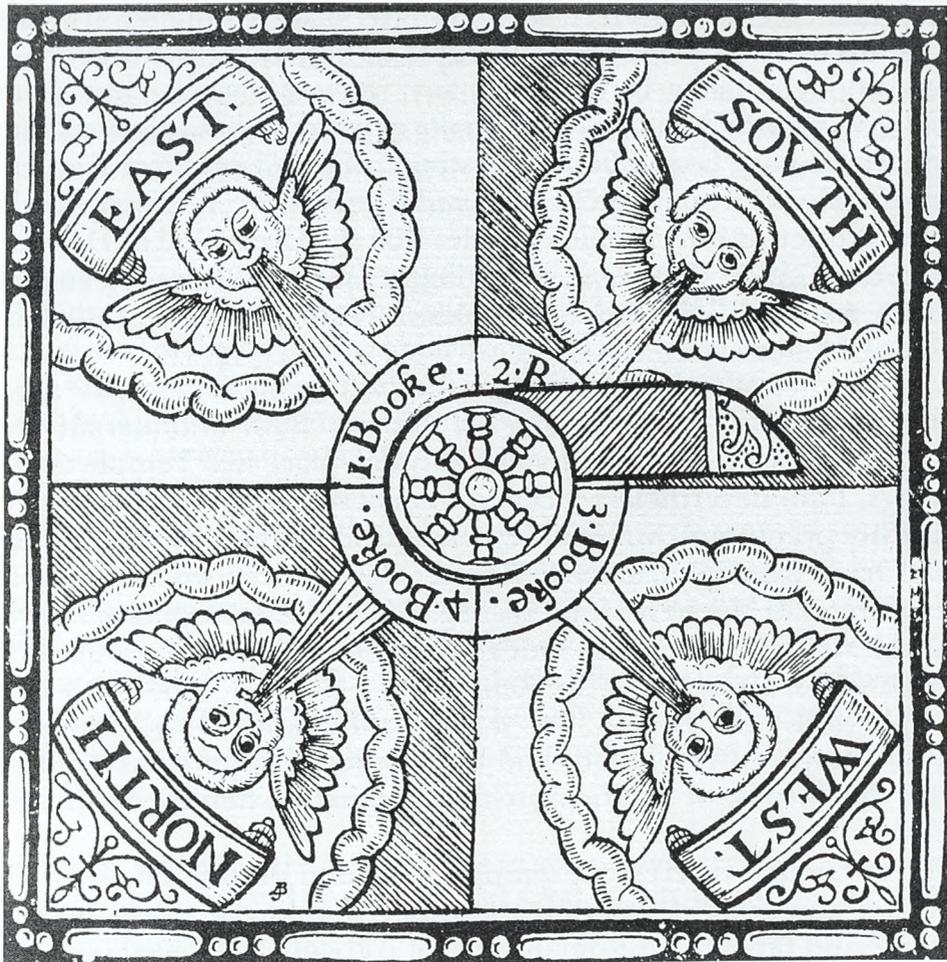


FIG. 11. The games page of Wither's *Emblemes*

to gambling, but so moral that it took off, went through edition after edition, mostly pirated, and was still being published as late as 1720. Its significance to the Wood family must remain a matter for speculation: perhaps a favourite game, or just simply an appropriate round joke for a round Circus. There may be a deeper significance. The crest behind the illustration of George Wither (Fig. 12) shares some quarterings with the crest which Wood created for himself sometime after 1732, when he dropped the Roman head seal from his letters and adopted the oak tree (Fig. 13). The wild man on the top of Wood's crest, an ancient Briton surely, carries a bough of acorns appropriate to a Druid and it is worth repeating again that acorns crest the Circus instead of the conventional pineapples or urns. But the crescents and the chevrons or set-squares are stolen from Wither and seem almost too appropriate for a Freemason who projected crescent buildings. Was Wither a relation in the maternal line?

The lottery emblem of the four winds that narrowed the reader to the four books, is repeated on the Doric frieze of the Circus between and above the coupled columns. The serpent circling the sun from the Tyberton altar of 1732 also reappears as the same sun and serpent carved on the metopes (Fig. 14). Serpents and flaming hearts are particularly favoured in Wither and on the Doric frieze. A winged and burning heart features in both the Circus and in Wither, and so does a crocodile (Figs. 15 & 16). Predictably the Masonic compasses, held by a hand emerging from a cloud, feature in Wither, and again on the metopes with another serpent to the right of it, wrapped around an urn (Figs. 17 & 18). A harp and a harrow are found in Wither, and both



FIG. 12. Portrait of Wither from his *Emblemes*

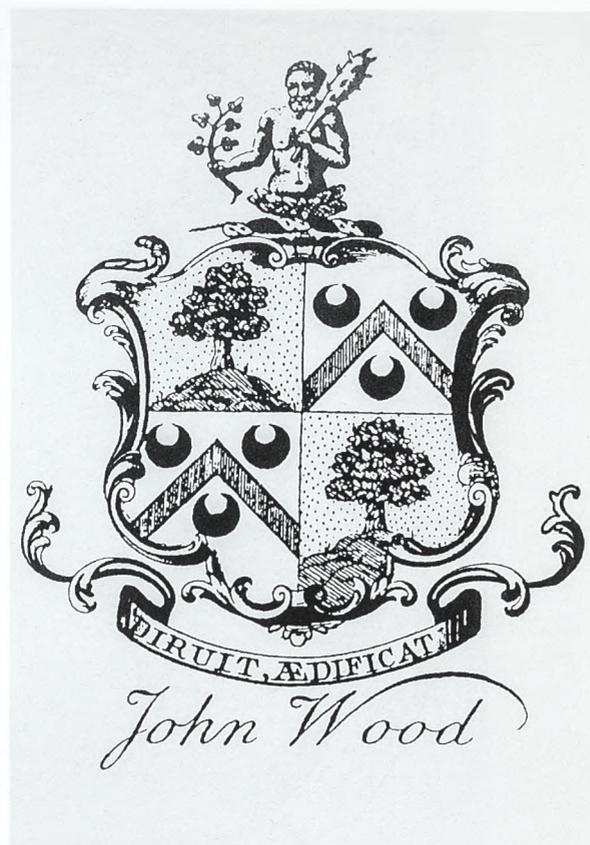


FIG. 13. Wood's unofficial crest

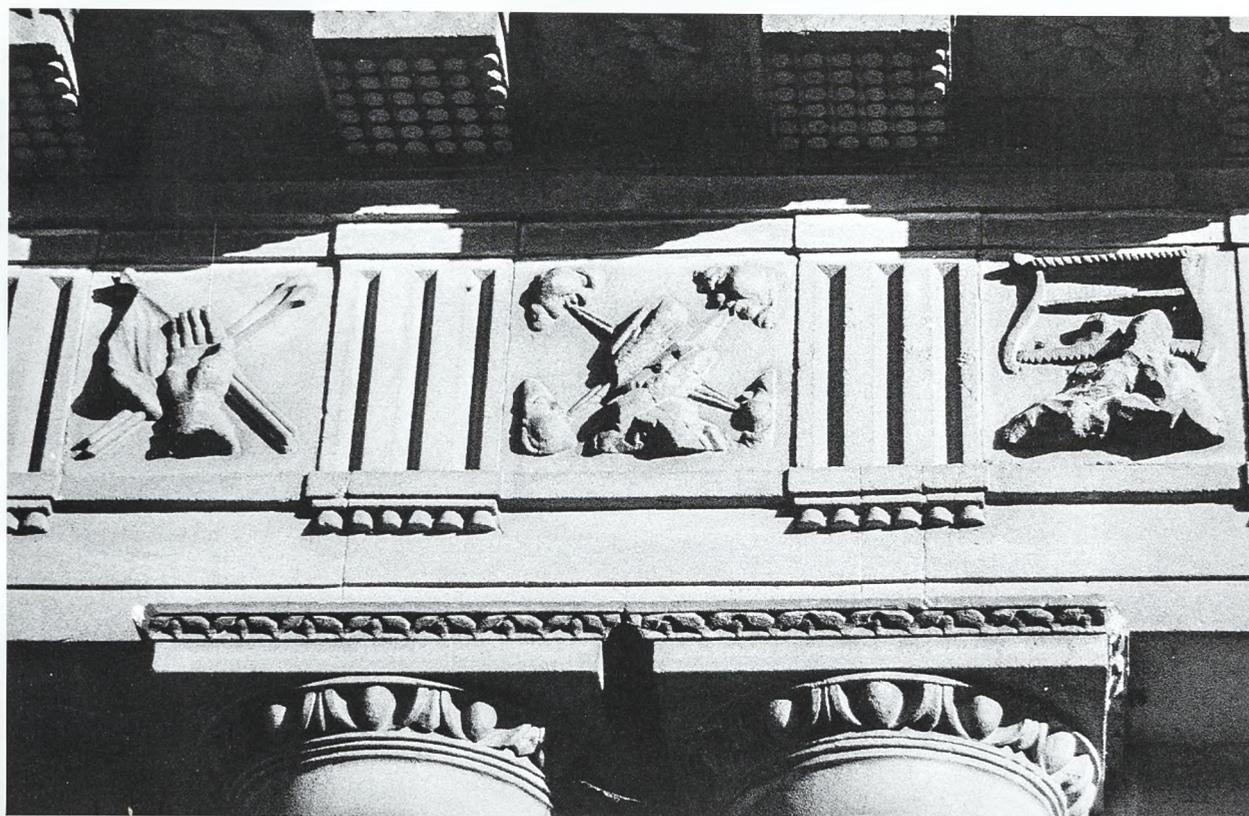


FIG. 14. Metopes from Wood's King's Circus

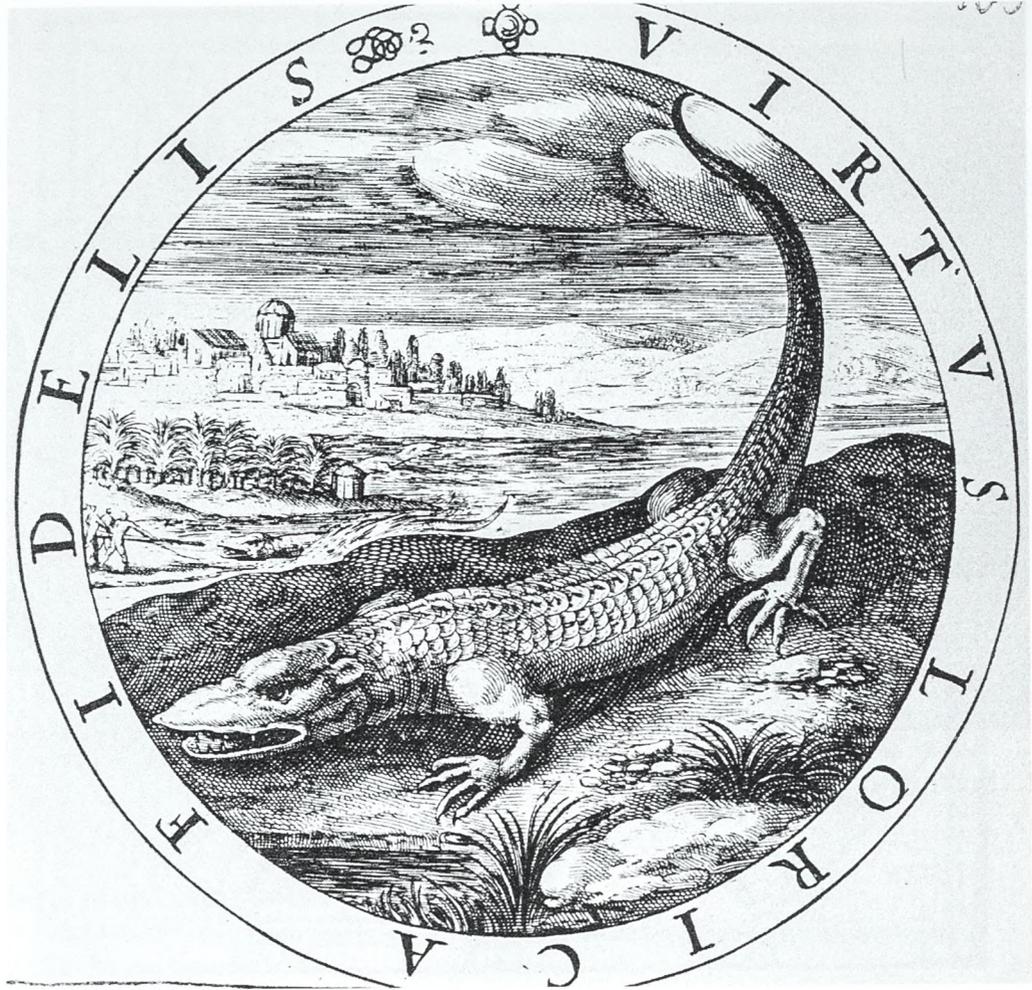


FIG. 15. A crocodile from Wither's *Emblemes*

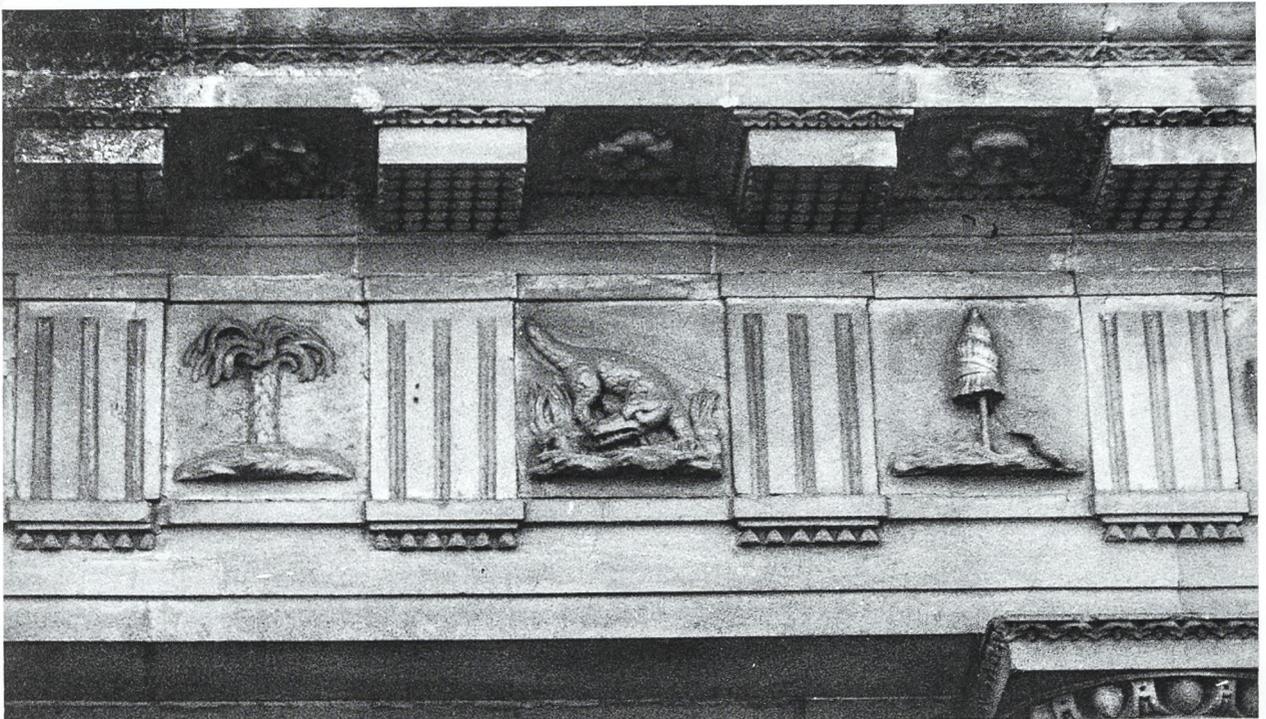


FIG. 16. Metopes from Wood's King's Circus

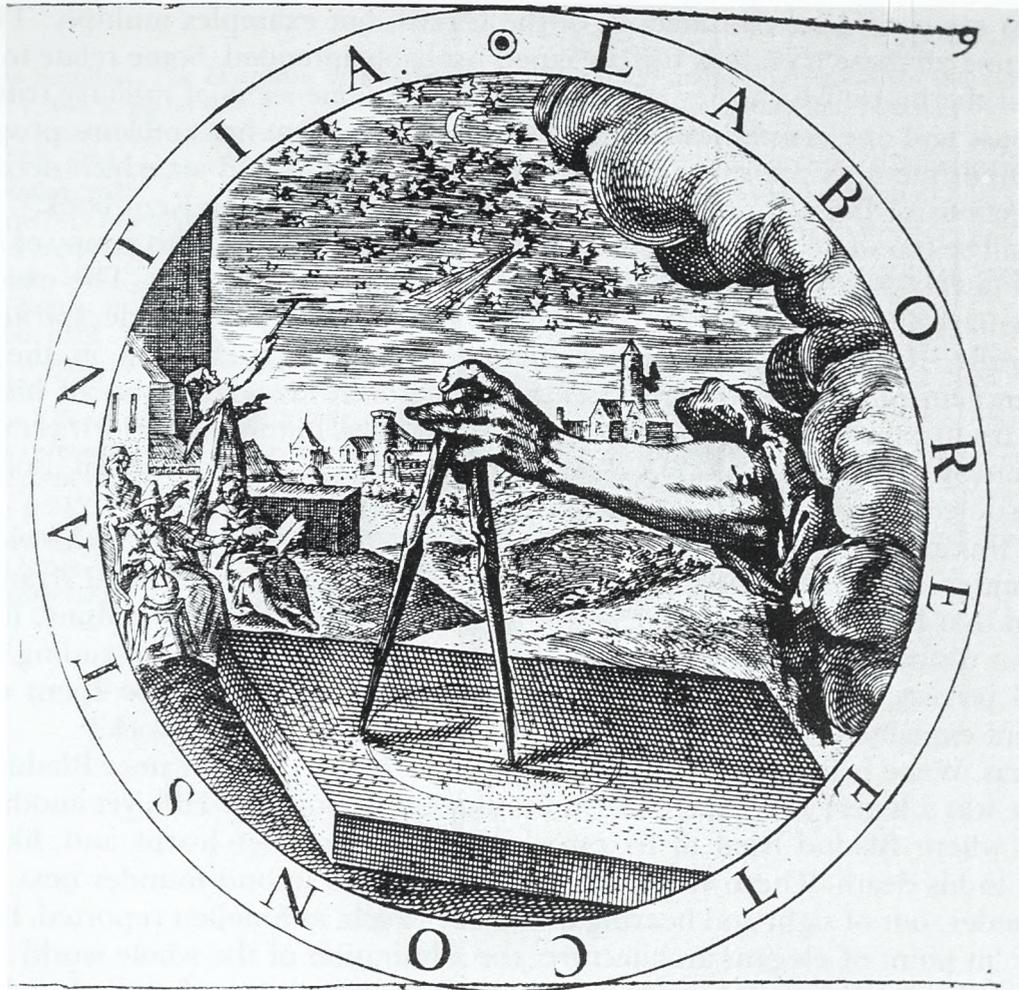


FIG. 17. Compasses from Wither's *Emblemes*

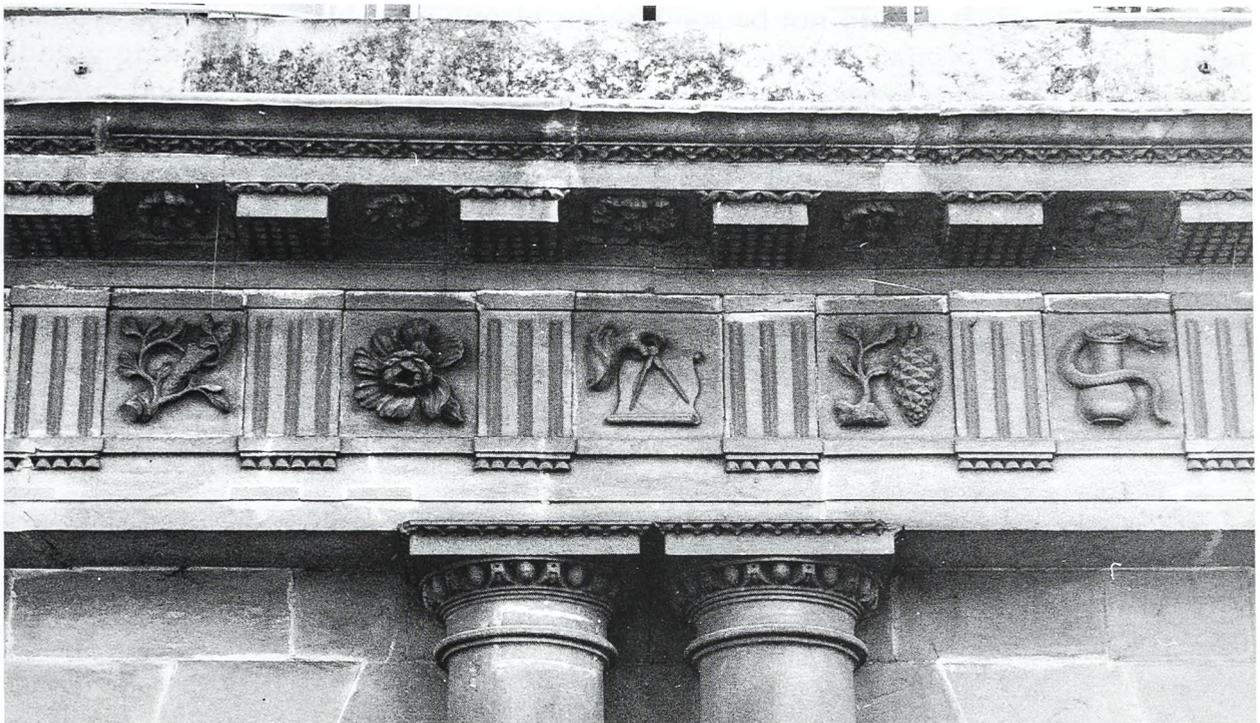


FIG. 18. Metopes from Wood's King's Circus

emblems are carved on the metopes of the Circus; but examples multiply. The game of detecting all these is endless fun, as Wood probably intended. Some relate to the first owner of the house which they decorate: there are some signs of military triumph on Pitt's house and one artist's house on the south-east segment has emblems proper to an artist. Other metopes are shaped like the trophies of arms and art which decorate the Doric sections of Inigo Jones's Whitehall Palace, taken from the Kent book.

It will be found helpful to examine these metopes personally with a copy of *Emblemes* in hand (a facsimile was published in 1968 and reprinted in 1973). The exercise will give a remarkable insight into the complex mind of a man who bestrode, spiritually and aesthetically, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a classicist in the antique Palladian vein of his hero Inigo Jones, a Romantic in his wild flights of historicism, finding his inspiration not in Gothic abbeys and castles, but in the forlorn yet evocative fragments of prehistory on local valleys and downland, a man provincial, isolated and proud, contentious, thwarted and rather unloved in his lifetime.

He found his last resting place in the humble village church of Swainswick where he lies under a simple black slab. That part of his will dealing with funeral arrangements required that he should be buried 'wrapt up in the cloaths then about him', indicating a nervous distaste at the thought of any hand, even a friendly one, intruding upon his physical privacy. The stipulation that no more than £20 should be spent upon his interment explains the stoic simplicity of the slab. But why Swainswick?

It was, Wood believed, the village of the swine, the pigs which Prince Bladud herded when he was a leper. The village lies in the shadow of Solsbury Hill, yet another hill of the sun where Bladud tried to fly on wings like a Somerset Icarus and, like Icarus, crashed to his death. There Wood chose to lie – Bath's second founder next to Bath's first founder, out of sight and hearing of the city which, as Smollett reported, he wished to make 'in point of elegant architecture, the admiration of the whole world'.<sup>25</sup>

Wood has no monument in the ungrateful city which he refounded and revived. In our book we end with an appeal that his living admirers and perhaps his brother Freemasons may come generously together to erect the kind of monument he would have appreciated. It should not be some mean plaque on a house wall or a symbolic twist of contorted bronze, but the man himself, larger than life, gesticulating grandly on a plinth. The place to set it up would be in the King's Circus where Wood intended George II to ride. He could be dressed in his plain surveyor's clothes, as in the portrait, but a Roman cloak should be draped over one shoulder. On his brow the sculptor might risk a garland of the Druid's oak leaves, one hand would point to the strange circle of stone houses around him and on his face there would be just the suggestion of a mocking smile.

## NOTES

1. Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, 1771, vol. I, pp.68-9.
2. Tobias Smollett, *An Essay on the External Use of Water*, 1752, p.39.
3. *Dissertation*, p.28.
4. Returns for Lodge No. 28 are given in Wilfred G. Fisher, *A History of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Somerset*, Bath, 1962.
5. Joan Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries*, 1956, p.78.
6. John Wood, *An Essay towards a Description of Bath* (1742-3; revised ed., 1749; 3rd ed., 1765, reprinted by Kingsmead Reprints, 1969), p.232. All subsequent references to the *Essay* are taken from the 1969 reprint of the 1765, 3rd edition.
7. *Essay*, p.245.
8. Hereford Record Office, Tyberton papers.
9. Inigo Jones, *The Most Notable Antiquity of Great Britain, vulgarly Called Stone-heng, On Salisbury Plain, Restored*, 1655; re-issued 1725.
10. *Essay*, plate opposite p.320.
11. One manuscript, probably the earlier, is in Sir John Soane's Museum, London, the other is in Bath Reference Library.
12. John Wood, *The Origin of Building*, 1744, p.94.
13. Anderson, *Constitutions*, p.21.
14. Drayton, *Poly Olbion*, p.167.
15. *Ibid.*, p.167.
16. British Museum, Harleian MS. 7354.
17. *Essay*, p.116.
18. *Ibid.*, p.452-3.
19. *Ibid.*, p.129.
20. *Ibid.*, p.119.
21. *Ibid.*, p.351.
22. *Ibid.*, p.120.
23. *Ibid.*, p.129.
24. *Ibid.*, p.128.
25. Smollett, *Essay on the External Use of Water*, p.39.



FIG. 1. Roger Morris: Marble Hill House, Twickenham, Middlesex – south front.



FIG. 2. Roger Morris: The Council House, North Street, Chichester, Sussex – principal front.

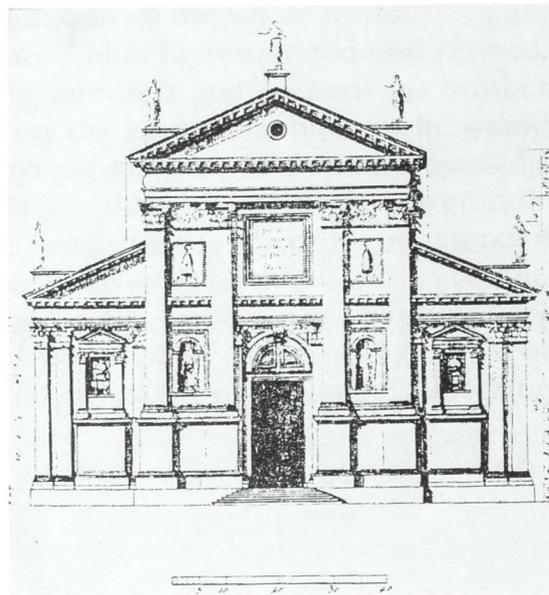


FIG. 3. Andrea Palladio: San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice – west front (O. B. Scamozzi, *Le Fabbriche e i Disegni di Andrea Palladio*, 1615, plate VIII).