

# 'O LORD! BATH IS UNDONE; 'TIS UNDONE; 'TIS UNDONE!'<sup>1</sup>

## *Bath and the Pre-history of Architectural Conservation\**

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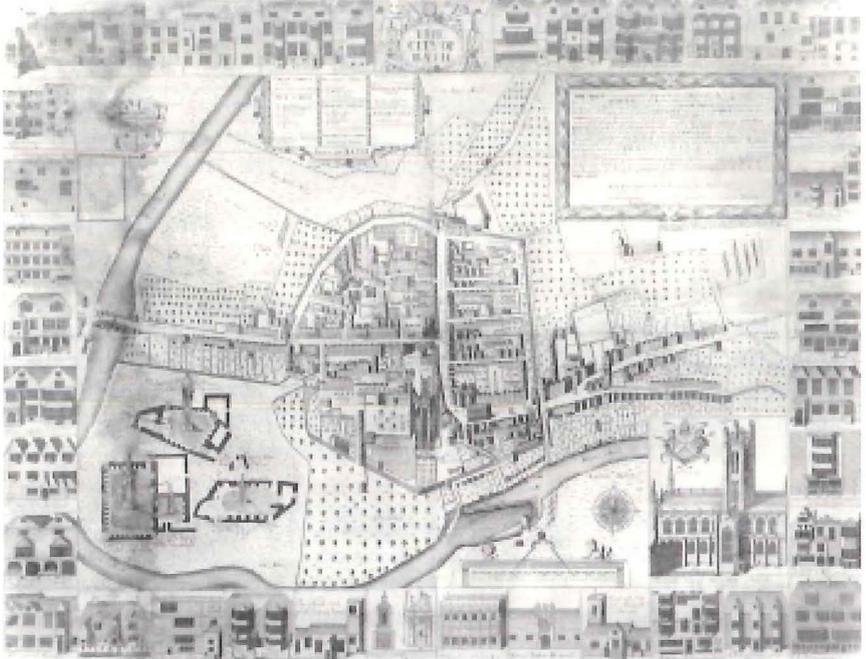
'Old Bath' as depicted by Joseph Gilmore in 1694 is a lost city. The great Abbey, one of five city gates and a few yards of its fortified wall survived the Georgian building. The fine houses depicted in the margin of his map were all demolished. To the partisan of Georgian architecture the principal value of 'Old Bath' is as a foil to the more elegant city built on its ruins. However, Gilmore drew his map to celebrate the buildings of contemporary Bath, which a proud member of the local Chapman clan, tradesmen and Common Councilmen, described in 1664 as 'this antient, little, pretty City'.<sup>2</sup> As Jean Manco has shown, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Bath had been substantially rebuilt in a grander and more prosperous fashion as a result of the revival in popularity of the spa.<sup>3</sup>

Modern Bath has 5,000 listed buildings and all but a handful of these – more than 95% – date from between 1700 and 1830. Bath as rebuilt by the Georgians is the only city in Britain to be listed as a World Heritage Site *in toto*. Is there an irony in our impeccable preservation of a city built at the expense of another? No, in my view, but it is important to appreciate how the past saw its past. Georgian Bath was a blueprint of urban modernity but it also had an exceptional pride in its own antiquity. John Wood (1704-54), a native, attempted to demolish and rebuild the entire town as depicted by Gilmore but aspired to the title 'Restorer of Bath'.<sup>4</sup> How do we reconcile these apparent paradoxes?

We should first consider two important differences in perception. To begin with, 'architectural conservation' is a recent phenomenon: its influence on the course of architectural development was negligible until the Victorian age. Hitherto, the demolition of the old and its replacement by the new seemed as natural a process as the passing of the seasons. New was bigger and better; brick replaced wood, and stone replaced brick; windows grew

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\*A version of this article discussing the broader 'pre-history of conservation' appeared in the *Transactions of the Association for Studies in the Conservation of Historic Buildings* (1993)



1. The City of Bath, drawn by Joseph Gilmore, 1694. (Reproduced by courtesy of The Building of Bath Museum)

larger, and panes of glass clearer. If any writer described a building as 'old' it was intended as a criticism.<sup>5</sup> The earliest local evidence for an adjustment in the meaning of the word of which I am aware is a letter to the *Bath Chronicle* in November 1850: 'As year by year, the memorials of Old Bath become more and more rare, and as they will ere long be obliterated I would call the attention of those interested in our local topography to an extensive portion of the wall of the Old City, which is now laid bare by the removal of the houses on the southern extremity of Orchard Street'.<sup>6</sup>

When John Wesley came to Bath in 1790 he saw the city during its greatest building boom: 'I took a view of the new buildings. There are at present none like them in England ...' He praised Lansdown Crescent and Bathwick New Town but concluded: 'And must all these fine buildings be burned up? Yea – Earth and heaven destroyed, Nor left even one in the mighty void!'<sup>7</sup> Architecture might be the most enduring of the arts but according to Christian doctrine every structure – whether marble temples or mud huts, Bath Abbey or Lansdown Crescent – would

crumble into dust when the Last Trump sounded at some unspecified time in the future. The universal acceptance of this doctrine in earlier centuries defined a limit to our predecessors' expectations of posterity: ultimately, preservation was futile. In his 1838 survey of Bath's modern history, *The Annals of Bath*, Captain Mainwaring commented 'the fabrics of Mr Wood, with all other earthly tenements, must, at some point, be alike mingled in the same common dust'.<sup>8</sup>

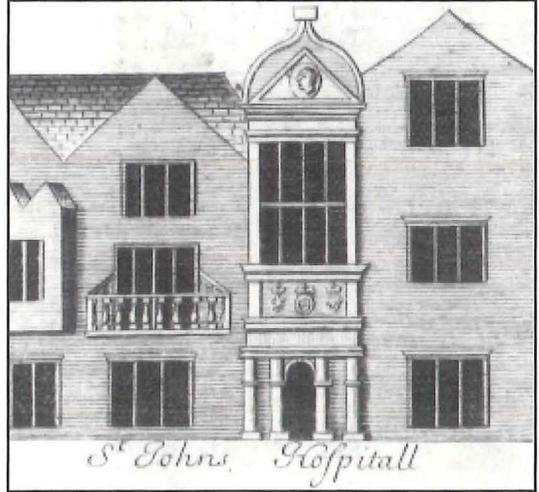
There was also the example of Rome, whose ruins suggested that the decline and fall of every great civilization was inevitable. The architect John Soane (1753-1837) commissioned imaginary views of his Bank of England at some unspecified moment in the future. The neo-classical Bank was Soane's masterpiece and a symbol of modern Britain's power: will today's achievements be tomorrow's ruins, the paintings ask?

As T S Eliot began *East Coker*, a poem of 1940:

In my beginning is my end. In succession  
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,  
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place  
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.  
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,  
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth,  
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces ...<sup>9</sup>

The past's acceptance of progress on the one hand and of the inevitability of decay on the other perhaps helps to explain why it was standard practice to recycle the materials of demolished structures for use in new buildings. More importantly, building materials represented a far higher proportion of the total cost of a building than they do today. Stone was expensive to transport while lime mortar – unlike modern cement mortar – is easily removed from old stones, allowing them to be re-laid in new walls on the same site. Modern archaeological research has demonstrated the Saxons' extensive use of *spolia* from Roman structures in the construction of the first Abbey at Bath and the city walls, confirming the observations made by the antiquary William Stukeley (1687-1765) in 1724: 'The walls round the city are for the most part intire, and perhaps [comprise] the old Roman work, except the upper part, which seems repaired with the ruins of Roman buildings; for the lewis holes are still left in many of the stones, and, to the shame of the repairers, many Roman inscriptions: some sawn across, to fit the size of the place, are still to be seen, some with the letters towards the city, others on the outside ...'<sup>10</sup>

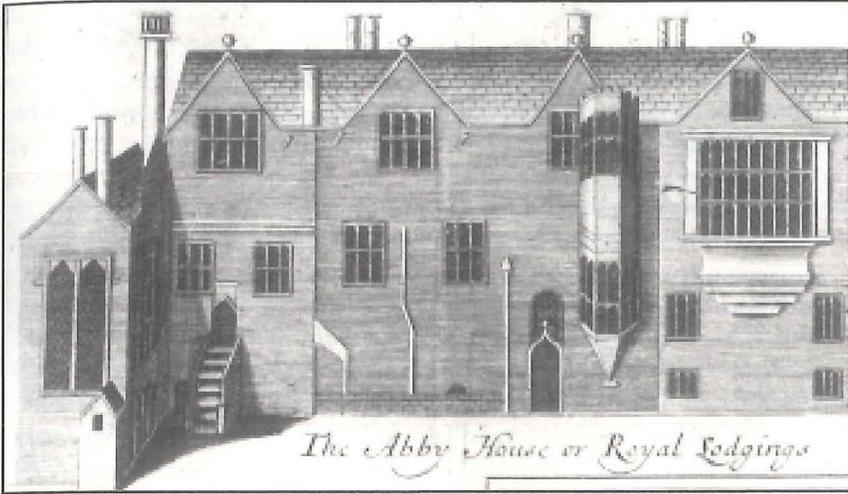
John Wood's first project in Bath was the reconstruction of the lodgings at St. John's Hospital, Chapel Court, from 1727, and he was instructed by his client, the Duke of Chandos, that 'old wainscoting will serve very well to line the dark closets [the privies].'<sup>11</sup> Wood pulled down the Elizabethan structure recorded by Gilmore (fig.2) but incorporated its thick stone spine wall into his new building. When in 1716



2. St. John's Hospital, detail from Gilmore, fig.1.

William Killigrew built the Hospital's chapel, he was allowed to sieve rubbish from the adjacent length of city wall to use as an aggregate in his mortar.<sup>12</sup> Each year the Corporation paid a portion of its plumber's bill with old brass and lead,<sup>13</sup> and so on: in this way 'Old Bath' was partially digested into the new city.

At times, destruction could be more determined. The principal cause of this was religion. In the fourth century AD, the blocks of sculpted stone forming the image of Sulis-Minerva were removed from the pediment of the Roman Temple in the sacred precinct and re-used as paving slabs, laid face down. Bath Archaeological Trust has suggested that this action might have been a deliberate gesture by Christians determined to efface the Pagan Gods.<sup>14</sup> The outstanding episode was the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536 and 1539, and of the chantries, chapels and hospitals in 1545. It is thought that substantial remains survive of only one-third of the 650 monasteries once in existence.<sup>15</sup> The Priory at Bath was dissolved in 1539 and the Abbey Church was sold to a local landowner, Matthew Colthurst. Its most valuable materials – the lead roof and brass bells, its glass and iron – were sold to be recycled and the stone shell abandoned to the wind and rain. The cloister abutting its south wall was demolished but for the west range, which had been the Prior's Lodgings. As commonly happened, this prestigious accommodation was converted into a private dwelling, the Abbey House (fig.3). During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I,



3. The Abbey House, detail from Gilmore, fig.1.

Colthurst's son Edmund donated the carcass of the Abbey to the citizens as their Parish Church, and it was restored through public donations. Common sense alone would have secured the Abbey's survival: begun as recently as 1499, it was a solid, modern structure and its renovation enabled the closure of three smaller and older parish churches.

The next episode of religiously-motivated destruction was the iconoclasm conducted under Parliamentary authority during the Civil War. The most notorious iconoclast was Dowsing in East Anglia who 'goes about the country like a bedlam breaking glasse windows'. One day in Ipswich he stripped eleven churches; on another in Clare, Suffolk, he boasted how his men 'broke down 1,000 pictures superstitious; I broke down 200'.<sup>16</sup> But the iconoclastic fury passed Bath by. Dr. John Wroughton's explanation is that the city was so whole-heartedly Puritan that there was no call for such demonstrative action.<sup>17</sup> A party of the city's Puritans did raid the Bishop's Palace at Wells, accusing Bishop Piers of Papist sympathies. The only evidence of vandalism in Bath is the defaced effigy of Sir William Waller, the Parliamentarian commander, in the Abbey. The damage has been attributed to Royalist troops billeted in the city but also to King James II himself; an anecdote suggested the King drew his sword and sliced off Waller's marble nose during his visit to the city in 1687.<sup>18</sup>

It was James II's visit that caused the little Cross Bath to become the focus of religious controversy. His Queen, Mary of Modena, came to bathe

there in the hope the waters would help her conceive. She did, and jubilant Catholics celebrated the arrival of an heir – the ‘Old Pretender’ – by erecting a monument in the Cross Bath, in gratitude to its waters. Jean Manco has described how immediately after James II’s overthrow the Corporation ordered the removal of its ‘Papist’ ornaments: a crown of thorns, inscriptions, and ‘all other superstitious things belonging thereunto’.<sup>19</sup> The Cross was repeatedly vandalized because of its unpopular associations and was finally removed in 1783. A single cherub was rescued and placed in a niche at the north end of Old Bond Street where it survives as the city’s only memento of Mary of Modena’s momentous conception.

There are few recorded instances of such energetic religious vandalism in the eighteenth century but a suspicion of ‘Popery’ still overshadowed medieval structures. As late as 1794 Uvedale Price, in his influential *Essay on the Picturesque*, suggested that the ruins of monastic abbeys seen in the landscape had a value which was moral as well as pictorial: ‘we may glory that the abodes of tyranny and superstition are in ruin’. In 1733 the citizens of Bristol removed the medieval market cross in their High Street, contending that it was a ‘superstitious relic’; it was rescued and re-erected as a feature in the gardens at Stourhead.

The second argument for the removal of the High Cross – and possibly the real motivation – was that it obstructed traffic. The creation of wide, uncluttered thoroughfares was essential to urban improvement. During the eighteenth century the enthusiasm for ‘Improvement’ superseded religious fanaticism as the principal cause of the destruction of old architectural fabric. A town which had once boasted of the height of its church tower or the stoutness of its defensive walls now aspired to a new image of classical regularity: streets and open spaces should be rectilinear and broad, clean and lamp-lit, paved in stone and fronted with façades of uniform design. Our attraction to irregular, half-timbered house fronts jumbled in narrow, twisting streets is a legacy of a Victorian change in sentiment, in itself a reaction to Georgian regularity.

As rebuilt by the elder and younger Wood, Bath was the blueprint of the modern ‘improved’ city. John Gwynn prefaced his proposals for *London and Westminster Improved* of 1766 with the statement that ‘there is not in the Kingdom one city, town or village wherein any regularity is observed, or attempt made towards magnificence or elegance, except the city of Bath’.<sup>20</sup> Few could fail to be impressed. In his *History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* of 1791 Rev. John Collinson could set aside his antiquarian instincts to describe modern Bath ‘as the pride of England and the admiration

of foreigners. The old city walls are now built over, and in its pristine state [Bath is] almost wholly obliterated by modern improvements. The most superb edifices, raised by the most skilful architects, rise in every quarter, and compose one of the most beautiful cities in the world'.

In 1755 the Corporation demolished the north and south gates 'in order to render the streets and avenues in and to this city more extensive and commodious'.<sup>21</sup> The West Gate went in 1776 and only the East Gate survived, no doubt because it did not represent any obstruction to traffic. The fortified ramparts were demolished in a more piecemeal fashion, as developers of new terraces like Westgate Buildings obtained permission from the Corporation to demolish the necessary length of wall.

For much of the century, however, there was a dramatic contrast between the old, unreconstructed centre and the Upper Town created by the Woods on the farmland rising to the north of the city. John Wood was born in Bath in 1704, but by the age of 17 was in London building neat brick houses in the squares north of Oxford Street. At 21 he returned to Bath and two years later presented a proposal to the Corporation to rebuild the town in the modern style 'so far as it related to the Estates under their Guardianship'.<sup>22</sup> The Corporation 'thought proper to treat all my schemes as chimerical'<sup>23</sup> and Wood realised his vision of modern magnificence in the open fields which lay outside the walls, and beyond the Council's control. Wood's Queen Square (1729-39) was immediately recognised as the finest square in Britain while as a consequence of the Corporation's small-mindedness, Wood complained, in the old centre of Bath there was 'not a Street, lane, Alley or Throng whose sides are straight, or whose surface is upon a true depending line to give them the least beauty'.<sup>24</sup> A tourist's description of Bath as late as 1787 presents a tale of two cities: Royal Crescent was as impressive as the Temple of Solomon but the 'blind alleys ... which separate the old town from the new' were as bad as the notorious slums of St. Giles-in-the-Fields in London.<sup>25</sup>

In the old city sash windows gradually replaced iron casements, slate replaced tile, and many houses were refaced in stone. Chapman's Lodgings of 1652 still overlooked the King's Bath, however, and in 1790 a visitor commented on projecting timber jetties.<sup>26</sup> Progress was piecemeal until the decisive Bath Improvement Act of 1789 and, as Jane Root has described, Thomas Baldwin created Bath Street and Union Street and widened and refronted Stall Street and Cheap Street.<sup>27</sup> Half a decade earlier Wood had proposed the demolition of 'narrow, inconvenient'<sup>28</sup> Cheap Street in order to create a vast piazza fronted by the Abbey and the Pump Room. What survived of the old, crooked city at the close of the century?

Did Georgian Bath try to preserve its historic identity while transforming itself into a model of modernity?

The various reconstructions of the spa complex failed to unseat the seventeenth-century statue of King Bladud in the King's Bath: he was too strong a symbol of the collective local identity. The citizens cherished the legend of Bladud's discovery of the Hot Springs long into the second half of the eighteenth century, so Richard Warner tells us in his *Historical and Descriptive Account of Bath and its Environs* of 1802, although as early as 1724 William Stukeley had ridiculed the folklore, describing the painted statue with the legend inscribed on its plinth as 'a fanciful image of K. Bladud, with a silly account of his finding out these springs, more reasonably attributed to the Romans'.<sup>29</sup> When the Stuart Guildhall was demolished in 1775 two of the statues on its façade were preserved: those of King Coel and King Edgar, each of whom played a role in the city's ancient folklore.

John Wood describes how he preserved an ornamental chimney-piece from one of the St. John's Hospital lodging houses he rebuilt: 'I have reserved the chief ornaments of the Chimney to this hour, because it is a testimony of that fame that ensured to our hot waters'. It had been donated by Lord Brooke in 1674 to express his gratitude to the spa waters which had cured his diabetes. In Wood's design for the west front of the new Hospital buildings he had proposed a pediment 'and in the Tympan[um] of it I proposed to place the Figure of the Head of Saint John the Baptist, together with several other Ornaments that embellished the old Frontispiece' in the centre of the east front of the old building, as drawn by Gilmore. However Wood's client, the Duke of Chandos, did not accept the design and St. John the Baptist disappeared from sight. Wood also describes a statue of Prince Bladud decorating the North Gate, poorly 'carv'd by some vile bungler's hands'; this figure was not rescued when the gate was demolished in 1755. The pieces of sculpture whose rescue from the Georgian bull-dozer has been described may have been exceptions to the rule.

In evaluating an old structure the eighteenth century distinguished between the building as a whole and individual features of symbolic significance or ornamental beauty; a statue or a coat-of-arms might be preserved but the structure itself would be demolished and its materials recycled. This distinction was not only due to straightforward greed: It was also influenced by an understanding of a building's integrity which is fundamentally different to our own conceptions. The Venerable Bede described how the dying St. Aidan slumped against the wooden buttress of a church on Lindisfarne. The buttress was incorporated into a succession

of churches built on the same site, in the belief that it would heal the sick and resist fire.<sup>30</sup> A fragmentary relic preserved the integrity of the whole, a view of posterity expressed by Francis Bacon as 'Time's shipwreck': 'antiquities are history defaced, or some remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of Time'.<sup>31</sup>

Since the eighteenth century, however, a more objective and less suggestive attitude has evolved: an historic building is evaluated as an entity and even a blank stone wall has an integrity which deserves to be respected. Dr. Chris Miele has suggested that this new approach may have begun in the 1830s with the first scholarly studies of Anglo-Saxon buildings, an architecture dominated by plain stone walls.<sup>32</sup> We are also influenced, no doubt, by John Ruskin's assertion that every stone dressed by the hand of a craftsman has a value in an age cheapened by mechanical mass-production.

The older way of understanding a fragmentary past is seen at its most complex and imaginative in the figure of the elder John Wood. As we have seen, he proposed to obliterate the town in which he was raised and to become the 'Restorer of Bath'. He saw beyond the visible reality of his environment to an imaginary, lost magnificence which he proposed to recreate. Three large rocks lying in a circle beside the road ascending Lansdown were, Wood assures us, the remains of 'a stupendous Altar; and the circular Foundation behind them seems to have borne other erect Stones, which, in all Probability, were set up by King Bladud for a Temple in honour of the Sun'.<sup>33</sup> As Tim Mowl has revealed, the Circus was imagined by Wood as a reconstruction of Bladud's circular temple on this site.<sup>34</sup> A second example is his attitude to the Abbey. He did not admire its Gothic ornamentation but contended that the dimensions of its ground plan and columns were abstracted from classical architecture: under its 'Gothick dress' the Abbey is 'really and truly an Egyptian hall of the Doric Order'.

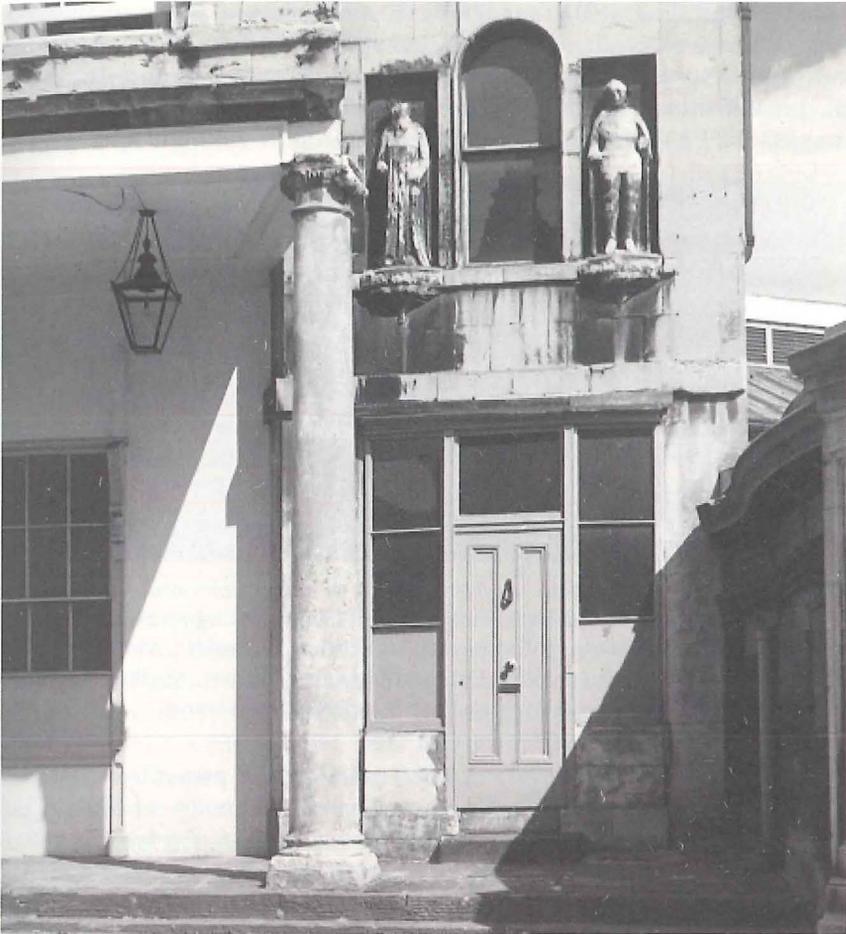
As Tim Mowl and Eileen Harris<sup>35</sup> have each demonstrated, Wood was determined to reconcile the classical style of architecture of pagan Rome with the superior, and older, authority of God and Moses. He achieved this, in his own mind, by aggrandizing the legendary figure of Bladud who, he argued, was a Druid High Priest who had studied classical architecture with Pythagoras in the ancient East and introduced the classical style to Britain many centuries before the Romans arrived. Bladud had constructed his Druid capital at Bath and the modern city was only a fragment of a metropolis which had encompassed Stanton Drew, some miles to the south. In the postscript to the 1749 edition of his *Essay*, Wood wrote a diatribe against the farmers who continued to break up the ancient

stones in the circle at Stanton Drew to use as building rubble: this destruction was 'rapacious ... base and ignoble'. This is the only occasion in his *Essay* when Wood criticises the destruction of old fabric.

In 1738 a Roman mosaic was discovered during the excavation of the foundations of Wood's new Mineral Water Hospital. The mosaic was preserved and recorded by Wood in a drawing which is exceptionally attentive and accurate for its time.<sup>36</sup> In no city in Britain was the ancient Roman heritage as strong a presence as in Bath. Its walls were studded with the inscriptions described by Stukeley and by John Leland, Librarian to Henry VIII: 'There be divers notable antiquitees engrav'd in stone that yet be sene yn the walles of Bath'. Every guidebook proclaimed the city's Roman antiquity and nearly every new development, it seems, discovered Roman traces underfoot. In 1791 Collinson described how 'The antiquities ... which have at different periods been cast up from among the ruinous foundations of the city are almost innumerable; vast masses of sculptured stone, columns, capitals, architraves and friezes of huge buildings; tessellated pavements, bricks of various shape and dimensions; paterae, urns, vases, lachrymatories, coins, silver and brass instruments of various kinds, having from time to time been discovered, and sold to strangers frequenting the city'.<sup>37</sup>

In 1727 workmen digging a sewer in Stall Street discovered the bronze bust of Minerva which today is the pride of the Roman Baths Museum. The bust was displayed in the Guildhall as a symbol of the city, and further discoveries were placed alongside in order 'to gratify the speculations of connoisseurs, and the reveries of the lovers of the vertu'.<sup>38</sup>

In the summer of 1755 the Roman Baths were discovered twenty feet below the Abbey House, which was being demolished for redevelopment. The ruins were drawn by the artist William Hoare and remained exposed to view until 1763 when the Duke of Kingston constructed a new suite of Baths on their site to capitalize on the hot springs which had bubbled up from the ruins.<sup>39</sup> The Baths disappeared until they were rediscovered in the 1880s; part of one Roman wall was demolished to provide a footing for a house in the new Abbey Square. Why were these ancient remains not preserved, when every year hundreds of Englishmen made pilgrimages to the ruins in Rome? The only explanation is the lack of appreciation for plain, unornamented masonry as expressed by one traveller in 1761: the Baths 'cannot be called good specimens of the famous and splendid Roman architecture, but it is obvious that they were built of bricks, without any great art or science, and probably by the Roman soldiers themselves, and it was not worth our while to go and see them'.<sup>40</sup>



4. The Museum of Antiquities, Hot Bath Street, Bath. The plan for this building, by John Palmer, then also working on alterations to the nearby Cross Bath, was approved by the Corporation in 1797. (*Photograph by Lesley Green-Armytage*)

By contrast, when labourers digging in Stall Street in 1790 discovered the portico of the Temple of Minerva and the sculpture of the Gorgon's head in its tympanum 'antiquarians poured in from all parts of the country to see the remarkable find', according to Barry Cunliffe,<sup>41</sup> and in 1800 the Corporation opened a small Museum of Antiquities in Hot Bath Street to display the fragments. The two battered figures mentioned earlier, King Coel and King Edgar, were placed in niches on the façade (fig.4).

This little building, which survives as a private house, was probably the earliest archaeological museum in Britain to be established by a municipal authority. The collection from the Guildhall was moved here, although the bust of Minerva remained as a symbol of the city. Can one suggest that Minerva had gradually supplanted Bladud in this civic role?



5. Illustration from the title-page of *Remains of two temples and other Roman antiquities discovered at Bath* by Samuel Lysons, 1802, showing an archaeological reconstruction of the temple of Minerva and the Sacred Precinct. This work was later incorporated in a three-volume edition of Lysons' *Reliquiae Britannico-Romanae*, published 1813-17. (Reproduced by courtesy of Bath Central Library)

John Carter's *Ancient Architecture of England* of 1795 presented the ruins of the Temple of Minerva as the most significant Roman remains to be discovered in Britain, and Samuel Lysons' collection of plates entitled *Remains of two temples and other Roman antiquities discovered at Bath*, of 1802, opened with a perspective view reconstructing the Temple and its magnificent precinct (fig.5). Carter owned a plaster cast made from a Roman bust found at Bath, then identified as Diana, and so did John Soane; Soane's is displayed in the Colonnade of his Museum at No.13 Lincoln's Inn Fields and was perhaps acquired at the auction held after Carter's death in 1817.<sup>42</sup> When the Corporation's Museum opened, the *Bath Herald* of 15 November 1800 reported 'we hear that Lord Powis has employed Mr. Lancashire, the statuary, to copy several of the most curious of these mutilated altars and mouldering ornaments to be placed among the choice antiquities of Powis Castle'. The idea of duplicating antiquities, whether in marble or in plaster, had originated in the Renaissance so that the collections of Rome could be admired and studied further afield. The

application of these processes to the Temple of Minerva suggests that it was considered worthy of being bracketed with 'real' Roman architecture.

The antiquities accumulated up to 1800 had been accidental discoveries made by building labourers, but in the following decades active archaeology expanded the Corporation's collection. When Pierce Egan, author of *Walks Through Bath*, visited in the autumn of 1818 he referred to 'the numerous excavations now making in and about Bath'.<sup>43</sup> Six finds – a mosaic, a sepulchral urn, a sarcophagus, for example – had recently been added to the Museum. When workmen digging a new vault at the Abbey in 1835 discovered a mosaic and sold the pieces to the public, as earlier generations had always done, it prompted an indignant article in the *Bath Chronicle*.

The architectural conservation movement as we recognise it today was not a development of this increasing sensitivity to classical archaeology, however. Its roots lay in new soil: the Gothic Revival. To men educated in the classical taste the story of English architecture began with Inigo Jones. To the virtuoso John Evelyn (1620-1706), for example, only two structures in London as it existed before the Great Fire deserved to survive: the Banqueting House Jones built on Whitehall (1619-22) and the Corinthian portico he added to St Paul's (1634), but not the cathedral's medieval nave and tower.<sup>44</sup> Jones introduced the pure Renaissance style of Andrea Palladio to Britain; it was revived by Lord Burlington's circle in the early eighteenth century and imported to Bath by John Wood. Thus Richard Warner could write, in his 1802 history of the city, that the art of architecture 'began to dawn [at Bath] about the beginning of the last [eighteenth] century: for though, in the Roman times, *Aquae Solis* had exhibited many specimens of splendid architecture, yet in the trouble which succeeded their departure from Britain, these had been overshadowed and obliterated; and the art never shewed itself at Bath again till the time of Mr Wood, about the year 1728 ...'<sup>45</sup>

The idea that the history of architecture can be seen as a succession of styles, each with its own merits – that is, in essentially comparative terms – was not maturely developed until well into the nineteenth century. Originally, the word 'Gothic' was not so much a definition as a damnation: the term was invented in the Italian Renaissance to identify medieval architecture with the barbarian Goths who had destroyed Rome.<sup>46</sup> The structures depicted by Gilmore fell into the 'Gothic' category: although fashionable pediments, pilasters and strapwork patterns had been applied to many façades, their overall design was not controlled by classical proportion and measure and as a result they fell below the threshold acceptable to Palladian taste.

The Abbey House was one of the few notable domestic structures to be medieval in origin and, as discussed, its demolition began in the summer of 1755, supervised by the younger Wood on behalf of the Duke of Kingston. In his *Essay on the Waters* of 1756 the doctor Charles Lucas urged its disappearance: 'There can hardly be a greater affront than to find a rude irregular Gothic building upon the ruins of very magnificent and elegant Roman Baths and sudatories'. All the city's surviving medieval parish churches were demolished and rebuilt during the Georgian period. The Rev. John Penrose visited St. James's – where John Wood had been baptised – in 1766: 'It is an old church, has been often repaired and enlarged, and the Minister told me that ... it would soon be taken down and rebuilt, built larger, for that it is not half big enough to contain the People who would be glad to attend there'.<sup>47</sup> It was rebuilt in 1768-69.<sup>48</sup> As late as 1817 Bathwick's Parish Church was demolished and replaced by a much larger neo-Gothic structure; the ivy-clad tower of the old church survives on the riverside.

The first 'conservationists' were men for whom the neglected architecture of medieval England had richer associations than the classical style imported from Italy. When the antiquary William Stukeley visited York in 1740 he described the Minster as 'an astonishing beauty, [which] produces an effect superior (in my opinion) to any building upon earth ... I cannot persuade myself to except even St. Peter's in Rome ... I must needs prefer it to to the Pantheon itself'.<sup>49</sup> In the garden of his parsonage at Stamford he constructed a mock-medieval Hermitage which he decorated with stained glass rescued from the town's churches, where its replacement by clear glass was still in fashion.

Men such as Stukeley, however, were seen as somehow irrelevant to the graft of real life; antiquarians were an irresistible subject to satirists. Brown Willis (1682-1760) began an interest in the medieval as a boy at Westminster School and studied every cathedral in England and Wales except Carlisle.<sup>50</sup> In his obituary in the *Quarterly Review* he was described as 'having, with one of the honestest hearts in the world, one of the oddest heads that ever dropped from the moon. He wrote the worst hand of any man in England: it was more unintelligible than if he had learned to write by copying the inscriptions upon old tombstones ...' Willis had ruined his family's fortune by being 'far too deeply engaged with past ages to bestow any portions of his thoughts and cares upon the present'. The obituarist cited as conclusive evidence of his eccentricity that when visiting Bath Willis would insist on lodging, not in one of the new streets, but in the Abbey House.

The Society of Antiquaries had been formed in 1717 and one of its earliest actions was to pay ten shillings to erect two wooden posts to protect the medieval Waltham Cross from being damaged by passing traffic.<sup>51</sup> In 1792 it began its most important campaign: the programme to record all the nation's cathedrals. This initiative may have been prompted by William Chambers, Architect to King George III, who in 1791 had suggested 'a correct elegant publication of our own cathedrals and other buildings called Gothic, before they totally fall to ruin, it would be of real service to the arts of design; preserve the remembrance of an extraordinary stile of building now sinking into oblivion ...'<sup>52</sup> Chambers seems to accept the inevitability of our cathedrals crumbling to dust; the Antiquaries' programme was intended to record, not to preserve.

The Society appointed John Carter (1748-1817) as its draughtsman and he measured and drew first St. Stephen's Chapel at Westminster and next Exeter Cathedral. Then came Bath Abbey, 'being the last building of any magnitude erected in the country in a style purely Gothic, and almost the last one which remains exactly in the state in which it was originally designed'. The Antiquaries' publication of Carter's superb drawings in 1798 was the first scholarly analysis of the building.<sup>53</sup>

John Carter was the first man to campaign to prevent the destruction of medieval fabric. A quarrelsome and obsessive medievalist – described as 'John the Baptist to Pugin's Christ' by J. Mordaunt-Crook – he was convinced that Gothic was our true 'National Architecture' and superior to the classical, a foreign importation.<sup>54</sup> In 1795 he arrived at Durham to record the Cathedral and was outraged to discover that plans for destructive 'improvements' to designs by the architect James Wyatt were in progress. The Society of Antiquaries refused Carter's plea for intervention. When, in the summer of 1797, Wyatt applied for membership of the Antiquaries Carter organised a protest but was heavily out-voted. It was not the Society's role to intervene in modern controversies. Carter continued his campaign independently and by his death in 1817 had published over two hundred polemical articles in the *Gentleman's Magazine* opposing alterations to medieval buildings.

During these decades there was a significant change in attitude, not least due to the isolation enforced by the Napoleonic Wars: a new generation unable to make the Grand Tour to France and Italy was nurtured on its native heritage. In 1822 the Gothic Revivalist L.N. Cottingham could preface his publication of views of *The Chapel of Henry VII at Westminster Abbey* with a confident reference to 'the desire at present evinced for the preservation of this species of building'.

This new sympathy came too late to save 'old Bath' but had a dramatic impact on the appearance of the Abbey. Its tall, poised structure had always excited admiration but as late as 1755 the *Bath Guide* dismissed as 'the work of superstition' the sculpture on the west front which illustrated Bishop King's dream of angels and ladders. The description of these carvings as 'wretchedly executed' but the Abbey's interior as 'lofty and awful'<sup>55</sup> – 'awe-inspiring', that is – by the Cornish parson John Penrose, reflected the conventional taste of the mid-century, as did the refurbishment he described: 'The Church hath lately been cleansed and beautified; all the monuments, the Roofs, the Windows, the whole Church throughout is as neat as possible and during the Lent, all the cushions; the Pulpit, Desk, Mayor's, Communion-Table, and other cushions and cloths are covered with Black ... very decent'.<sup>56</sup> The Georgians liked their churches – so the Gothic Revivalists were later to say – to be as neatly and comfortably furnished and upholstered as their drawing rooms.

When the Society of Antiquaries published Carter's views of the Abbey in 1798 the only criticism made was of the 'miserable' modern houses built against the north elevation. The demolition of these began in 1823, thanks to a determined effort by the Rector and the Corporation. It was in the 1820s that the architecture of the Abbey began to enjoy a new measure of respect.

In 1825 *The History and Antiquities of Bath Abbey Church* was published by John Britton, a prolific and persuasive journalist who 'did more to promote the due appreciation of medieval art than any other contemporary writer'.<sup>57</sup> Britton devoted two pages to strong criticisms of the Abbey's condition and the intrusion of Georgian furnishings. It was a 'cause for regret, and even indignation' that Prior Byrde's Chantry Chapel was white-washed and dilapidated. The galleries fixed between the spandrels of the arches in the Choir should be removed. The altar and communion table should be in a more fitting style. The numerous marble monuments cluttered up the piers. The organ case was 'inappropriate and tasteless' (fig.6).<sup>58</sup> In 1833 all these faults were amended in a restoration which cost £27,000, although the raised galleries remained until G.G. Scott's restoration of the 1860s. A new stone organ screen in a style which corresponded with the architecture was commissioned from the architect Edward Blore who was, before Pugin, the most knowledgeable expert on Gothic detail. The City Architect George Manners oversaw the work and designed the new altar and communion table in a Gothic style.



6. Interior of Bath Abbey Church, from *The History and Antiquities of Bath Abbey Church* by John Britton, 1825. (Reproduced by courtesy of The Building of Bath Museum)

Prior Byrde's Chapel was restored to its original condition as a result of a successful fund-raising appeal and the architect for this work, Edward Davis (1802-1852), published *Gothic Ornaments Illustrative of Prior Birde's Oratory* in 1834. Davis's introduction to his book of lithographs underlines the change of attitude which had taken place. The Chapel 'was fated to experience the same neglect to which all Architecture of a Gothic character was so long exposed. For three centuries it was abandoned to the mercy of the parish officers; its fronts were defaced by monuments; the lower compartments of the windows were built up, and those parts permitted to remain exposed were washed and re-washed with coats of various hues, until all the sharpness of the carved work was lost, and much of the delicate tracery was altogether obliterated'.

On the exterior of the Abbey, George Manners added flying buttresses to the nave and octagonal pinnacles to the east front, replacing the square turrets which had been installed in the seventeenth century. To Manners, these alterations realised the original intentions of William and Robert Vertue, the architects of 1499, but to others they were an unnecessary interference in a structure sanctified by time. In March 1834 a correspondent wrote to the *Bath Chronicle*: 'The workmen employed upon the Abbey have this week removed the square faced towers which rose flush upon the eastern front. In their place octagonal towers are now building. Oh, that the mantle of Oliver King [the Bishop who built the Abbey] had fallen upon some of our citizens who could check the barbarism which dictates these changes!'<sup>59</sup>

The local historian Mainwaring dubbed the dispute 'pinnacle warfare'.<sup>60</sup> Manners' new pinnacles were rebuilt by G.G. Scott to a new design in the restoration of the 1860s; in 1905 T.G. Jackson in turn replaced Scott's. The 1830s argument indicates that Bath had reached a second and more mature stage in its attitude to conservation. The premise that certain buildings should be preserved for posterity was now widely accepted; the debate had moved on to ask not 'if' but 'how'. Did later alterations – such as the square turrets – which had weathered many years, deserve to survive, or should they be replaced by modern designs which were closer to the architects' original intentions? The 'pinnacle warfare' of the 1830s was essentially the 'restoration versus repair' debate which overshadowed the Victorian campaigns of architectural conservation and which still preoccupies us today.<sup>61</sup>

## Notes

- 1 John Wood, *An Essay Towards a Description of Bath*, 2nd ed. (Bath, 1749), p. 225. Wood expressed vividly the anxieties felt by contemporaries at the changes taking place in his time: '... the Citizens, in general, were so uneasy at the Sight of every new House that was begun, that, in the utmost Despair they cry'd out, "O Lord! Bath is undone; 'tis undone; 'tis undone!'"
- 2 Henry Chapman, *Thermae redivoivae: The City of Bath described* (Bath, 1673).
- 3 Jean Manco, 'Bath and the Great Rebuilding' in *Bath History*, Vol. IV (Bath, 1992), pp.25-51.
- 4 *Bath Journal*, 18 February 1754. Quoted in an account of the laying of the foundation stone of the Circus.
- 5 By contrast, 'venerable', 'antique' and 'ancient' were compliments.
- 6 Bath Central Library, Hunt Collection, cutting from the *Bath Chronicle*, November 1850.
- 7 *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. N. Curnock, 8 vols. (1909-16), vol.8, p.46, entry for 3 March 1790, quoted in Trevor Fawcett, *Voices of Eighteenth-century Bath* (Bath, 1995), p.11.
- 8 R. Mainwaring, *The Annals of Bath* (Bath, 1838), p.451.
- 9 T.S. Eliot, *East Coker* (1940), II.1-7 from *Collected Poems 1909-62* (1974), p. 166.
- 10 William Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum*, 2 vols. (2nd ed., 1776, based on 1724 ed.), Vol.I, pp.146 and 148.
- 11 Huntington Library, California, Brydges MSS. Letter from the Duke of Chandos to John Wood, 8 June 1727.
- 12 St. John's Hospital Archive, Bath. Contract between William Killigrew and St. John's Hospital for the rebuilding of the chapel, 9 February 1716 .
- 13 Bath Record Office, Bath Chamberlain's Accounts. In 1755, for example, lead and brass to the value of £11 0s 5d was salvaged from the demolished North Gate.
- 14 Barry Cunliffe, *Roman Bath Rediscovered* (1971), p.17.
- 15 See M. Briggs, *Goths and Vandals* (1952), pp.20-24. This is the best general account of the history of architectural conservation although its account of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been superseded by publications such as *The Future of the Past*, ed. Jane Fawcett (1976).
- 16 Quotations from Briggs (1952), p.65.
- 17 Author's conversation with Dr. Wroughton, 1993.
- 18 This story is repeated, for example, in H. Storer's description of the Abbey in *Cathedral Churches ...*, Vol.VI (1819).
- 19 See Jean Manco, 'The Cross Bath' in *Bath History*, Vol.II (Gloucester, 1988), p.65.
- 20 John Gwynn, *London and Westminster Improved* (1766), p.13.
- 21 *The Bath Guide* (Bath, 1762).
- 22 Wood (1765 ed.), p.243.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Wood (1749 ed.), p.242.
- 25 Charles Dibdin, *A Musical Tour* (Sheffield, 1788), pp.33-34, letter ix, 21 October 1787; quoted in T. Fawcett (1995), p.10.
- 26 *Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1790, quoted in Manco (1992).
- 27 Jane Root, 'Thomas Baldwin: His Public Career in Bath, 1775-1793', *Bath History*, Vol.V (Bath, 1994).

- 28 Wood (1749 ed.), p.340.
- 29 Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum: Centuria I* (1724), p.128.
- 30 See N. Boulting, 'The Law's Delay' in *The Future of the Past*, ed. J. Fawcett (1976).
- 31 Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, ed. Joseph Dewey (1868), II, 2, section 1.
- 32 Author's conversation with Dr. Chris Miele of English Heritage, the authority on William Morris and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, 1998.
- 33 Wood (1765 ed.), p.119.
- 34 Tim Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, *John Wood: Architect of Obsession* (Bath, 1988), p.26 and pp.179-206.
- 35 Mowl, *ibid.*; Eileen Harris's analysis of Wood's theory is in her *English Architectural Books and Writers 1550-1785* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.480-491.
- 36 Cunliffe (1971), p. 75.
- 37 Rev. John Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* (Bath, 1791), p.102.
- 38 Collinson (1791), p.101.
- 39 Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bath* (1948), p.54.
- 40 Friedrich Kielmansege, *Diary of a Journey to England in the Years 1761-1762* (1902), pp.127-28, entry for October/November 1761; quoted in T. Fawcett (1995), p. 115.
- 41 Cunliffe (1971), p.9.
- 42 The plaster bust in Carter's collection was sold at Sotheby's, 24 February 1818 as Item 261. Soane's Library contains a copy of the catalogue.
- 43 Pierce Egan, *Walks Through Bath* (1819), pp.120-123.
- 44 Briggs (1952), p.89.
- 45 Rev. Richard Warner, *The History of Bath* (1801), p.95.
- 46 *Romanesque Architectural Criticism* by T. Bizarro (Cambridge, 1992) is an analysis of this changing stylistic terminology.
- 47 John Penrose, *Letters from Bath 1766-67*, ed. Brigitte Mitchell and Hubert Penrose (Bath, 1983); letter of 30 April 1766.
- 48 Ison (1948), pp.73-4.
- 49 Stuart Pigott, *William Stukeley* (2nd ed., 1987), p.122.
- 50 Information from the *Dictionary of National Biography*, pp.2286-87.
- 51 See Boulting (1976).
- 52 Chambers made his remarks in the third edition of his *Treatise On Civil Architecture* (1791) p.40. The Society of Antiquaries decided their programme on 30 March 1792: see J. Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries* (1956), p.206.
- 53 John Carter, *Some Account of the Abbey Church at Bath* (1798).
- 54 See J. Mordaunt-Crook, *John Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival* (1995) for a study of Carter and the episode described below.
- 55 Penrose (1983), letter of 24 April 1766.
- 56 Penrose (1983), letter of 13 April 1767.
- 57 Charles Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival* (1872), p.86.
- 58 John Britton, *The History and Antiquities of Bath Abbey Church* (1825), pp.92-93.
- 59 Bath Central Library, cutting in Hunt Collection.
- 60 Mainwaring (1838), p.424.
- 61 The fullest description is in J. Fawcett (1976), *passim*.