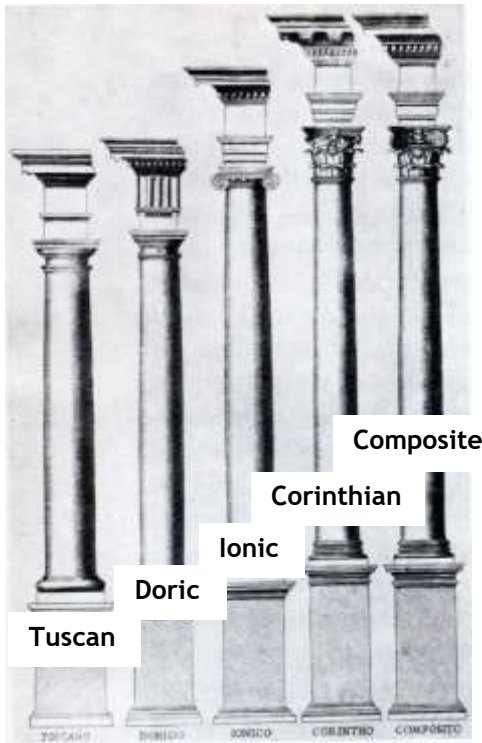


# FROM ROME TO THE ROYAL CRESCENT

The story of how the language of classicism translated from the ancient monuments of Rome to the designs of John Wood the Younger for the Royal Crescent is actually very simple, yet also very complex. These notes provide some background and information to this essential story in Bath's architectural history.



## Rome & the Language of Classicism

Classicism in architecture is based on the proportions and decoration of the Five Orders from classical antiquity. These Orders (columns supporting a structure above) originated in Ancient Greece (the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian are the Greek Orders) and then developed through the buildings of Ancient Rome (the Romans added Tuscan at the bottom and Composite at the top).

The Roman architect and writer Vitruvius (Marcus Vitruvius Pollo) described the use of the Orders in his 1<sup>st</sup> century BC work *De Architectura* (The Ten Books on Architecture). In this work Vitruvius outlines the essential qualities of architecture *firmitas, utilitas, venustas* - that architecture must be solid, useful and beautiful. He also links the proportions of the human body as being the source of the proportions of the Orders. The writings of Vitruvius, as well as buildings

such as the Pantheon and the Colosseum in Rome, established a language of architectural classicism that would be continually explored and innovated.

Vitruvius' work is the only writing on architecture to survive from antiquity and as such it became the basis for most treatise and works on architecture that followed. Although lost during the dark ages his ideas were rediscovered by architects during the Italian Renaissance who studied the buildings from antiquity alongside Vitruvius' ideas to create new interpretations of classicism.

## The Pantheon, Rome, 118-128 AD

One of the most complete buildings to survive from Roman antiquity. The round body and dome influenced the method of internally planning a building from the centre out that is referred to as central planning. The portico [entrance porch made up of columns supporting a triangular pediment] has influenced the design of countless churches, public buildings, villas and townhouses.





## Palladio & Renaissance Italy

During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the work of architects such as Alberti, Sebastiano Serlio and Andrea Palladio saw a deeper understanding of the architecture of antiquity and brought a new originality to the possibilities of classicism.

Of all the architects of this period, Palladio was the most influential and widely imitated.

Born in Padua in 1508, Andrea di Pietro was the son of a stonemason, and began his career training to follow in his father's footsteps. In his mid-teens he moved to Vicenza where his talents were recognised by Count Gian Giorgio Trissino, a wealthy nobleman, writer and amateur architect.

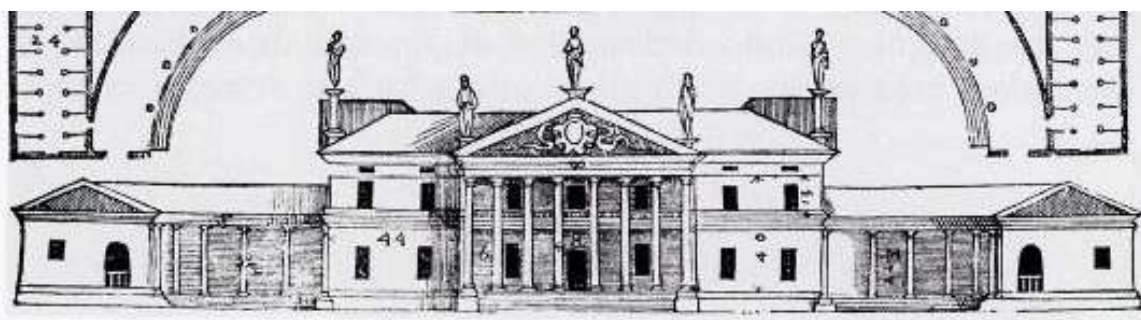
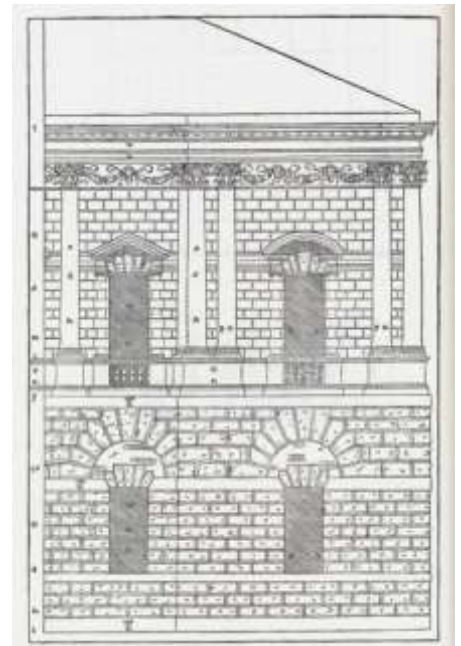
Trissino introduced him to the writings of Vitruvius, travelled with him to see the ancient and modern architecture of Rome and invented for him the classical name Palladio.

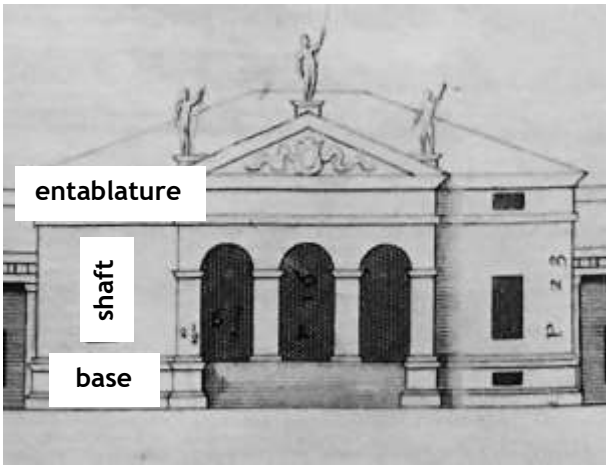
Palladio moved from stonemason to architect and as his work progressed he established a systematic approach to design. He developed a set of standard motifs and dimensions he could apply to every project and modify if necessary. The result was a huge quantity of executed buildings and a distinctive architectural style.

Palladio recognised the need for an architectural book that was both practical and intellectual and therefore easily accessible to masons and patrons alike. In 1570 he published *I quattro libri dell' architettura* (The Four Books on Architecture), providing a clear insight into classical architecture and a model of how to reinterpret antiquity to suit the demands and ideas of modern life.

In the *Quattro libri* Palladio filtered and extended the ideas of Vitruvius, to produce a discussion on the orders of architecture that was understandable for all levels of reader. It was a practical publication, in which descriptions of ancient dwellings and temples are combined with detailed instructions for the design of modern villas, palazzos, roads and bridges.

The illustrations, printed from woodcuts, were precise anatomical scale drawings complete with dimensions of both antique buildings and Palladio's own designs. The combination of concise and understandable text with clear readable images made the *Quattro libri* hugely influential, and it remains one of the most inspirational and enduring architectural books ever published.

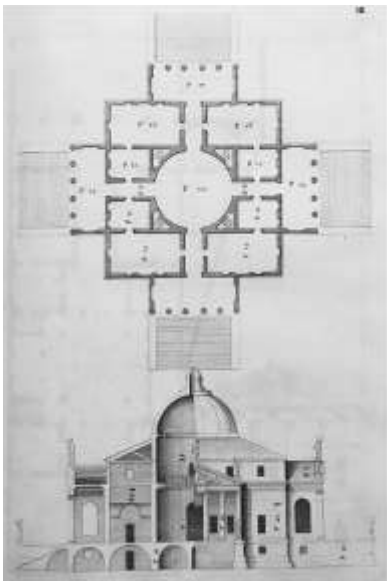




**Villa Saraceno, Andrea Palladio, c.1545**

From 1541 Palladio made several trips to Rome to study and draw the city's famous ancient monuments. He mastered the use of the ancient Orders and adapted them to suit his modern buildings. His early villas, such as Villa Saraceno, are noted for their simplicity, and established three key components that would be found in most of his designs, a basement, a first floor (or *piano nobile*), and an attic. This arrangement stems from the components of an

Order, base, shaft, entablature.



**Villa Rotonda, Andrea Palladio, 1565-6**

Villa Almerico, more commonly known as Villa Rotonda, is Palladio's most famous villa. The building is centrally planned like the Pantheon and illustrates the classical ideal of symmetry.

Rotonda sits on a low hill overlooking its surroundings and looked up to by anyone approaching. It has the theatrical appearance of a temple in the landscape, making it an ideal combination of architecture and setting.



**Villa Cornaro, Andrea Palladio, 1552-54**

At Villa Cornaro Palladio created a double loggia, where the Orders are seen in hierarchy, Ionic columns on the ground floor and Corinthian above. He also adapted the use of the Orders in this way in elevations for city residences or palazzos. Like most of Palladio's villas it is made of brick then rendered in plaster with lines carved to make it look like blocks of stone.





## Inigo Jones & 17<sup>th</sup> Century England

In the early seventeenth century, the architect Inigo Jones travelled through Italy annotating his copy of the *Quattro libri* while visiting Palladio's buildings. When he returned to England, Jones brought with him a collection of original Palladio drawings. These, combined with his experiences in Italy, provided an invaluable source of information on the architecture of classical antiquity, as well as the reinterpretations and ideas of the Italian Renaissance.

Jones was appointed Surveyor to the King's Works in 1615. His designs for a house for Queen Anne at Greenwich and a new Banqueting House for Whitehall Palace, created models of English Palladian architecture that the architects of the eighteenth century would aspire to.

While his architecture never moved far outside of commissions for the Stuart Kings, Jones introduced a clear understanding of classical architecture, as interpreted by Palladio and the Italian Renaissance, to English intellectual circles, and established the foundations for the great rise of Palladianism in the eighteenth century.

### The Queen's House, Greenwich, Inigo Jones, 1616-38

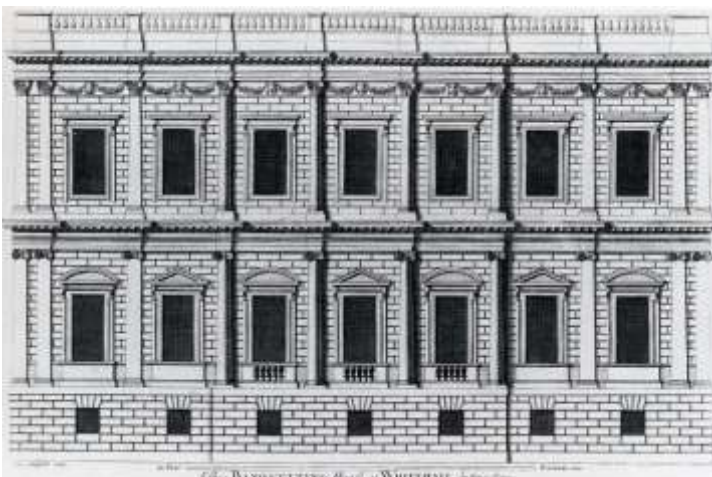
Inigo Jones did not imitate Palladio's designs but took inspiration from them, combining ideas from the Renaissance with his own interpretation of antiquity and frequently ancient British history.

The scale, simplicity and proportions of the Queen's House, alongside the clean lines and quality of the stonework, made Jones' work unlike anything else in English architecture at the time.

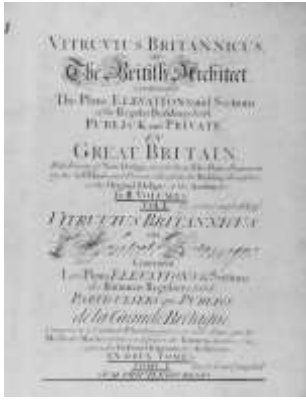


### Banqueting House, Whitehall, Inigo Jones, 1619-22,

When first built the Banqueting House in Whitehall, originally part of Whitehall Palace, would have been unlike any other building in the city. Surrounded by Tudor buildings, with gabled rooflines and small windows, Jones' building was a radical departure from what



While Jones introduced this form of Palladianism to England it was expensive and almost entirely remained work done for the Stuart Kings. It did not spread widely or rapidly following his work, but the ideas did begin to influence other architects. The generation who followed, architects of the Baroque like Christopher Wren, also experimented with classicism, but in a less pure manner.



## Palladianism in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England

The first English translation of Palladio's *Quattro libri* was published in 1715 by Giacomo Leoni making Palladian architecture accessible to every builder, mason and aspiring architect in England who had access to a copy (or pages from one). In the same year architect Colen Campbell created a source book for country house classicism titled *Vitruvius Britannicus, or the British Architect*. Both books helped establish the architecture that became known as Palladianism.

In *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Colen Campbell published illustrations of seventeenth century architecture were placed alongside designs by Inigo Jones. By doing so Campbell was exposing the excesses of the then dominate English architectural style, the Baroque, by highlighting the purity of Palladianism. He then included his own designs for country houses, indicating the form that eighteenth century architecture should follow.

At the same time Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington, had returned from his grand tour of Italy. At his town house in London, and his self-designed villa at Chiswick, Burlington established a group of artists, architects and sculptors intent on creating a noble architectural style for England by designing *all' antica* (in the antique manner).

Knowledge of classicism increased during the 18th century as gentleman returned from their Grand Tour in Italy with books, paintings and even fragments of buildings. This fashion for antiquity soon influenced the design of new buildings, especially country houses as new generations of aristocrats and landed gentry inherited from their fathers. The rising merchant class, men of earned wealth rather than inherited, also sought to impress through the building of country seats. *Vitruvius Britannicus* being used as a pattern book during this time, and ensured that Palladiansim would soon define country house design.

Alongside this country house style, Burlington and his circle were defining the style of city architecture in London, and Palladianism soon became the defining English architectural style of the eighteenth century.



Colen Campbell made three designs for Wanstead House in Essex, all published in volumes of *Vitruvius Britannicus* 1715-25. The second design (above) was built, but without the old fashioned coupla on the roof. It became the model Palladian country house design influencing, among others, John Wood at Queen Square and Prior Park.

**Houghton Hall , Norfolk Colen Campbell & James Gibbs (corner towers), 1722-29**

Houghton was based in part on Colen Campbell's model English Palladian villa, Wanstead House in Essex. It does not imitate Palladio or Inigo Jones, but rather blends their ideas and other influences to create something new. Houghton was built for Sir Robert Walpole, the first Prime Minister in England and like all country houses, was a symbol of the power and wealth of its owner.



**Mansion House, London, George Dance the Elder, 1739-53**

Palladianism spread nowhere faster than in London where public buildings in the style were seen alongside detached city residences such as this one built as the home and office of the Lord Mayor of London. The large Corinthian portico gives the building a grandeur which, added to its location in the heart of the City of London, proudly proclaimed the position and importance of the Mayor who lived within.



**Chiswick House , Middlesex**

Richard Boyle, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Burlington, 1725-29



Although different in both plan and elevation there is a clear line of descent from Palladio's Villa Rotonda to the Earl of Burlington's Chiswick House. Burlington was not just looking to Palladio however, he also experimented with the ideas other Renaissance architects and above all infused the design with his own inventiveness.

**Spencer House, John Vardy, 1756-65**

At Spencer House John Vardy created a building designed to impress that mixed the grandeur a city palace with the scale of a country villa.

This hybrid of urban and rural would be developed further when terraces of townhouses united behind a country house elevations were introduced into London and Bath.

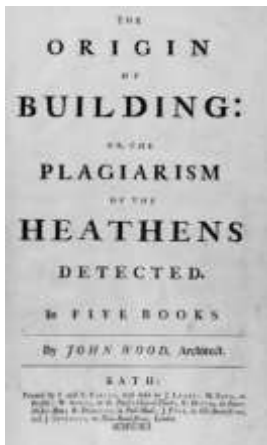
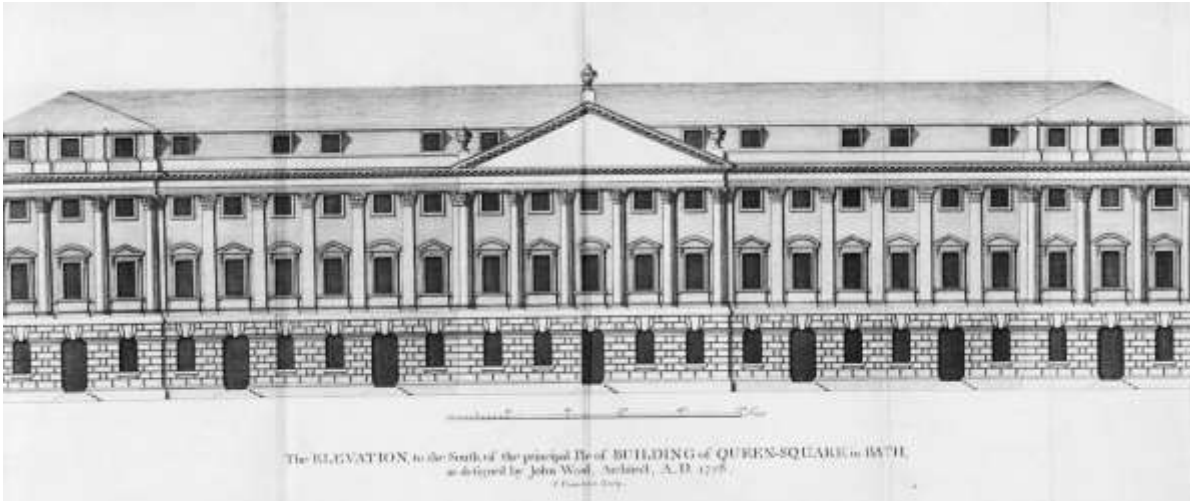




## The Woods & the Royal Crescent

John Wood the Elder educated himself in the ideas of Palladianism while working in London and at Bramham Park in Yorkshire. When he returned to Bath in 1727, he introduced to the city a modern and fashionable architectural style that encouraged expansion outside of the old medieval walls and would come to define building in Bath for the next century.

Wood's development for the Duke of Chandos at St John's hospital established his reputation as a Palladian architect, and in his design for the north range of Queen Square (which he admits owes a debt to Campbell's Wanstead House) he produced his finest example of Palladian design.



### **The Origin of Building or the Plagiarism of the Heathens Detected**

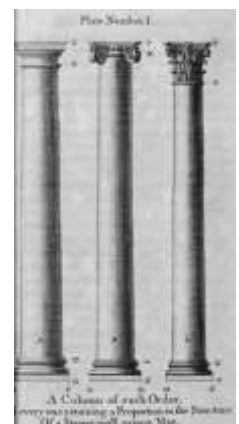
John Wood the Elder, 1741,

It became popular for English 18th century architects to publish a treatise on the development of architecture and include their own designs. The majority of these works followed Vitruvius as the source for explaining the origin of the Orders from antiquity. In his book however, John Wood looked instead to the Bible and wrote a history of architecture beginning with the Temple of Solomon. Wood believed that this biblical architecture was merely copied (or plagiarised) by the Romans.

### **A Dissertation upon the Orders of Columns**

John Wood the Elder, Written 1743, published 1750,

In this book Wood expanded upon the ideas concerning the development of the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian Orders that he had set out to prove in the *Origin of Building*. Compared to the *Origin of Building* however, this slim volume was less expensive and far more practical, making it a more accessible book for a builder or craftsman.





**Prior Park, Bath, John Wood the Elder, 1735-43**

Wood's design for Ralph Allen's house at Prior Park was to be an essay in the Orders, with a Doric office wing, an Ionic entrance front and a Corinthian garden front. As at Queen Square, Wood looked to Colen Campbell's Wanstead House for inspiration, but he wanted to show

that his design was even better than that which had become the accepted model for country houses. Wood proudly points out in his description of the house, the Corinthian columns of the garden front at Prior Park were 1½ inches larger in diameter than those at Wanstead.



**An Essay Towards the Description of Bath, John Wood the Elder, 2 vols, Second Edition 1749**

Continuing his history of architecture in this work Wood stressed the importance of ancient Bath as a pre-Roman city through with his belief that biblical architecture came to Ancient Britain through the Druids and the mythical founder of ancient Bath, Bladud (rather than through the Romans). In this way Wood provided his Palladianism with an essential link to Bath and a unique sense of Britishness. Unfortunately his theories had little influence on anyone other than his son.

**The Royal Crescent, Bath, John Wood the Younger, 1767-75**

John Wood the Younger had seen his father advance Palladianism in Bath through the design of townhouses behind a palatial elevation at Queen Square and the extraordinary innovation of the Circus. Wood the Younger owned a copy of James Stuart & Nicholas Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* (1762), showing that he was interested in the emerging Neo-classical ideas, and therefore fully in tune with the architectural climate of his day. At the Royal Crescent the Younger Wood stripped away decoration leaving only the essential elements of the Order for structural honesty, 114 giant Ionic columns, that actually appear to be supported by the basement and support the entablature above. The building needs no for further decoration because Wood allows it's grandeur to come from its monumental scale placed within its landscape setting.





## Suggested Reading

Key texts that are good introductions are underlined.

### General

John Summerson, Architecture in Britain 1530-1830.  
The Classical Language of Architecture.  
The Architecture of the Eighteenth Century.  
David Watkin English Architecture: A Concise History.

### Inigo Jones

John Summerson Inigo Jones.  
Vaughan Hart Inigo Jones: The Architect of Kings.  
Giles Worsley Inigo Jones and the European Classicist Tradition.

### Palladianism

Robert Tavernor Palladio and Palladianism.  
John Harris The Palladian Revival: Lord Burlington, his villa and his garden at Chiswick.  
J Stevens-Curl Georgian Architecture.  
Susan Weber William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain.  
Giles Worsley Classical Architecture in Britain: the Heroic Age.

### Bath

Walter Ison The Georgian Buildings of Bath  
James Ayres Building the Georgian City  
Michael Forsyth Bath, Pevsner Architectural Guides  
Mike Jenner The Classical Buildings of Bath  
Tim Mowl  
& Brain Earnshaw John Wood, Architect of Obsession

The Building of Bath, Building of Bath Collection Guidebook, 2009.

Obsession: John Wood and the Creation of Georgian Bath, Building of Bath Museum, 2004.

### Other useful books

Nikolaus Pevsner Pevsner's Architectural Glossary (Pevsner Architectural Guides)  
Charles O`brien Houses: An Architectural Guide (Pevsner Architectural Guides)  
Simon Bradley Churches: An Architectural Guide (Pevsner Architectural Guides)

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### Volunteer Guides notes

Originally made to accompany exhibition From Rome to the Royal Crescent

11 Feb - 4 June 2017 at No.1 Royal Crescent

Amy Frost, Bath Preservation Trust

Feb 2017

