

# ARCHITECT OF OBSESSION

John Wood and the Creation of Georgian Bath

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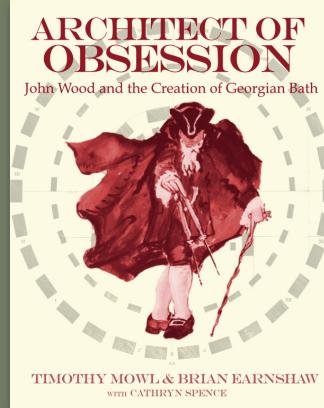
WITH CATHRYN SPENCE

**John Wood, the most successful town planner of English eighteenth-century architects, was ferociously eccentric.** The very idea that Bath, his grand artefact and a byword for classical order, should owe as much to the prehistoric stone circle at Stonehenge and the Second Temple in Jerusalem strains credibility, but that is the historic truth presented here through Wood's own writing and a whole body of archival material.

While reshaping an entire Welsh cathedral to the dimensions of Solomon's Temple, Wood prised open the tomb of a Celtic saint to gaze wonderingly on the mouldering remains. He rode wildly through the night to mourn over the corpse of a woman lodger who had hanged herself with a silk scarf in his Queen Square town house.

A fervent Freemason, he revived certain mystical emblems of Stuart religiosity and had them carved on a major building project – the King's Circus – to evoke the sun worship of a lost Druid civilisation which had everything to do with his imagination, nothing to do with reality.

Wood was inspired by sources so improbable that, until this book first appeared in 1988, no historian had written about them for 200 years; Bath had deliberately ignored them. And yet that same city – fashioned by the most unconventional of minds – is today recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage site, *one of the most beautiful cities in Europe*.



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