

Architects, Angels, Activists and the City of Bath, 1765–1965

Engaging with Women's Spatial
Interventions in Buildings and Landscape

CYNTHIA IMOGEN HAMMOND



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ASHGATE

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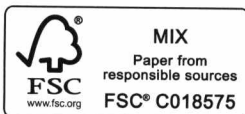
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ARCHITECTS, ANGELS, ACTIVISTS AND THE CITY OF BATH, 1765–1965

A unique contribution to the architectural and social history of Bath, *Architects, Angels, Activists and the City of Bath, 1765–1965: Engaging with Women's Spatial Interventions in Buildings and Landscape* approaches the past with the methods of the architectural historian and the site-specific interventions of the contemporary artist. Looking beyond and behind Bath's strategic marshalling of its past, Cynthia Imogen Hammond presents the ways in which women across classes shaped the built environment and designed landscapes of one of England's most architecturally significant cities.

This study argues that Bath's efforts to preserve itself as an idealized Georgian town reveal an aesthetics of exclusion. Jane Austen may be well known, but the role of historic women in the creation of this city has had minimal treatment within the city's collective, public memory. This book is an intervention into this memory; the author uses site-specific works of public art as strategic counterparts to her historical readings. Through them, she aims to transform as well as critique the urban image of Bath. At once a performative literature, an extensively researched history, and an alternative guide to the city, *Architects, Angels, Activists* engages with current struggles over urban signification in Bath and beyond.

Cynthia Imogen Hammond is Associate Professor of Architectural History at Concordia University, Canada.

To the women of Bath

List of figures

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs were taken by the author.

Cover Cynthia Hammond, *fallen/winged*, performance (video still), Bath, 2000.

Map of Bath and surrounding area, including Batheaston. Drawn by the author

0.1 Aerial view of the Circus, 1754–68, linked by Brock Street to the Royal Crescent, 1767–75, designed by John Wood the Elder and John Wood the Younger. Photograph by Mandy Reynolds, 1981. Copyright *Bath in Time*, used with permission

1.1 Cynthia Hammond, *Mending Icarus' Wing*, 1997. Found branches, wire, handmade cast paper, cotton. 5' × 6' × 2' 6". Photograph by Craig Morrison, 1997, used with permission

1.2 *King Bladud* (Stefano Valerio Pieroni, limestone, 1859) and *The Pig* (carved by Nigel Bryant, assisted by City of Bath College students, based on an original by Alan Dun, limestone, 2008). Public sculpture, Parade Gardens, Bath. Photograph by Caroline Thibeaud. Courtesy of Bath & North East Somerset Council

2.1 John Wood the Elder, The Circus, completed in 1768 by John Wood the Younger

2.2 The Circus, detail of metopes

2.3 The Royal Crescent, 1767–75, designed by John Wood the Elder and John Wood the Younger

2.4 Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon (1707–1791), Huntingdon Chapel, Bath, 1765

3.1 Bath Abbey, Bath, begun 1499, with the Pump Room in the foreground at right (Thomas Baldwin and John Palmer, completed 1789). Photograph by Thomas D. Strickland, 2007, used with permission

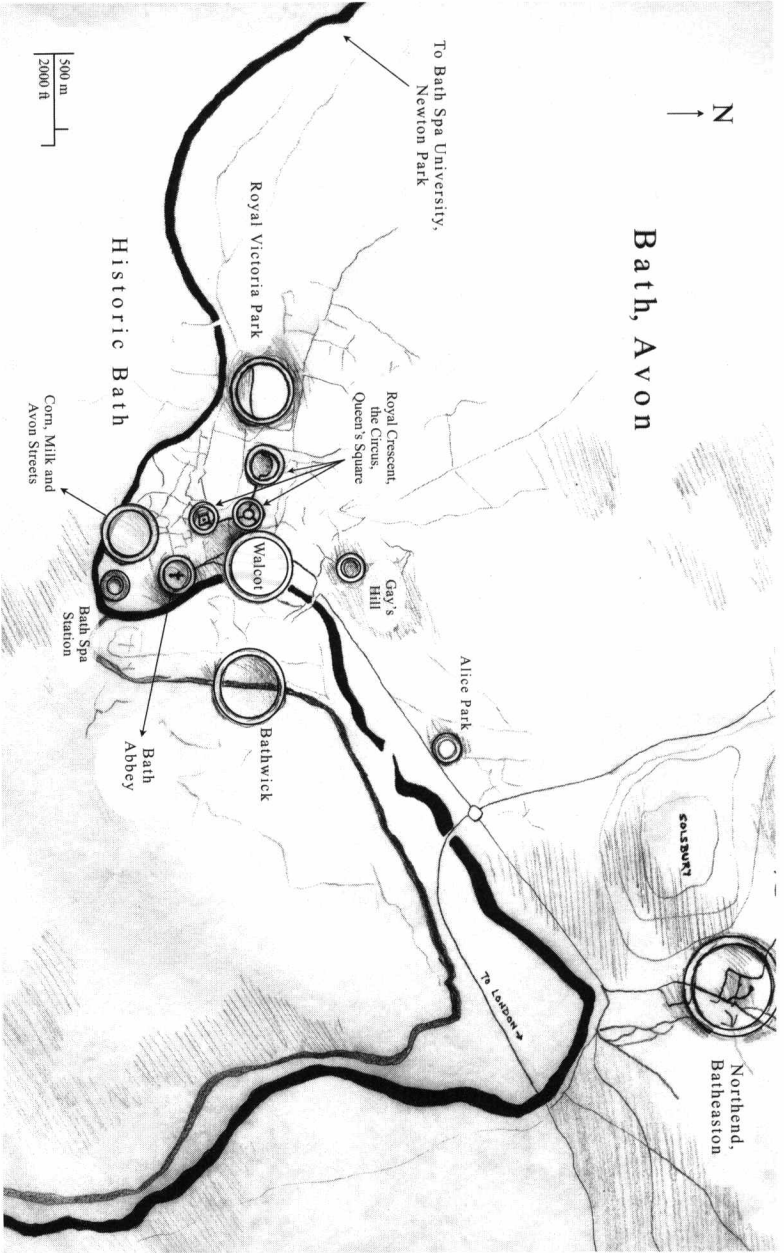
3.2 Ascending and descending angels, west front, north buttress, Bath Abbey. Visible are medieval, Victorian and mid-twentieth-century additions

3.3 Sir George Frampton, RA, *Angel*, Clipsham block stone, north buttress, Bath Abbey, Bath, 1899–1901

3.4 Sir George Frampton, RA, *Angel* (male), Clipsham block stone, Bath Abbey, Bath, 1899–1901

- 3.5 Sir George Frampton, RA, *Lamia*, ivory, bronze, opals, glass, 1899-1900. Copyright Royal Academy of Arts, London, used with permission
- 3.6 Sir George Frampton, RA, *Enid The Fair*, bronze with wood base, 1907. Courtesy of Sotheby's Picture Library, used with permission
- 3.7 Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Love that Overcometh*, from the front cover of *The Suffragette* 1.35 (13 June 1913). Photograph by Sean Sexton. Hulton Archives, Getty Images, used with permission.
- 4.1 Newton Abbot Trent, Memorial to Edward VII, *Angel of Peace*, bronze, 1910. Photograph by Jim Ebdon, 2009, used with permission
- 4.2 Preparatory sketch for *pro fanus*, ink on paper, 1999
- 4.3 *breathe/animer*, performance with Caroline Alexander, Jeffrey Golf, Karen Huska and Rhaya Fridman on violin, Montreal, 1999. Photograph by Grayson Cooke
- 4.4 *pro fanus*, performance, Bath, 1999. Photograph by Eugénie Shinkle, 1999, used with permission
- 4.5 Katja Kessin, detail of *winged*, ten photographs of the artist's tattooed back, installed in the park at the centre of The Circus, Bath, 2000
- 4.6 Lydia Sharman, *To catch her fall*, silver mandala, flowers, herbs, Bath Abbey, 2000
- 4.7 Caroline Alexander, *escape ladder*, thread, Bath, 2000, used with permission
- 5.1 Anonymous (English School, eighteenth century), *Ladymead House, Walcot, Bath*, oil on board, c. 1730. Copyright Victoria Art Gallery, Bath & North East Somerset Council/The Bridgeman Art Library, used with permission
- 5.2 Cover, 1844 *Annual Report, Bath Female Home and Penitentiary*. Courtesy of Bath Record Office, Bath & North East Somerset Council, reference 0341/1/2/2
- 5.3 Cover, 1846 *Annual Report, Bath Female Home and Penitentiary*. Courtesy of Bath Record Office, Bath & North East Somerset Council, reference 0341/1/2/2
- 5.4 J. Hinte, *Survey of Ladymead House, or the House of Help for Women and Girls, Walcot Street, Bath*, 1924. Courtesy of Bath Record Office, Bath & North East Somerset Council, reference DP2819
- 5.5 Courtyard of Ladymead House today, looking south to Walcot Street. Composite photograph
- 5.6 Cynthia Hammond, *fallen/winged*, pocket/book, 5" × 8", edition of 25, installed in various locations in the historic core of Bath, 2000
- 5.7 *fallen/winged*, located in a blind arch belonging to a former bank, now residential. Thomas Baldwin, architect, late eighteenth century. Hay Hill, Bath, July 2000. Cynthia Hammond, *fallen/winged*, performance (video still), Bath, 2000
- 5.8 Cynthia Hammond, *fallen/winged*, performance (video still), Bath, 2000, passing the former Asylum for Teaching Young Females Household Work, at the corner of Gay's Hill and Belgrave Crescent. Video footage by Colin McMahon, used with permission
- 5.9 *fallen/winged*, performance (video stills). Video footage by Colin McMahon, 2000, used with permission

- 6.1 *The Suffragettes' Wood*, c. 1909. Photograph by Colonel Linley Blathwayt. Copyright *Bath in Time*, used with permission
- 6.2 *The Suffragettes' Wood*, 22 April 1909. Photograph by Colonel Linley Blathwayt. Copyright *Bath in Time*, used with permission
- 6.3 Dolan Bull Associates, "Plans for Eagle House, Batheaston", 1965. Courtesy of the Somerset Heritage Centre, reference number D\R\ba/22/1/712
- 7.1 Helen Kirkpatrick Watts's tree planting ceremony, 17 March 1911, Eagle House. Una Stratford Dugdale's monkey puzzle tree can be seen to the left. Photograph by Colonel Linley Blathwayt. Copyright *Bath in Time*, used with permission
- 7.2 Cynthia Hammond, detail of *The Suffragettes' Orchard*. Site-specific, interactive artwork. Gifts (plants, printed bags, printed texts) given to the present-day residents of the former Suffragettes' Wood, Batheaston. 16 October 2009
- 7.3 Rose Lamartine Yates's Austrian pine, planted 30 October 1909 in the Suffragettes' Wood, Eagle House, Batheaston, Bath. Photographed 16 October 2009
- 8.1 Plan of Eagle House, 1904, produced in conjunction with Powell & Powell, Auctioneers. Copyright *Bath in Time*, used with permission
- 8.2 Colonel Linley Blathwayt, untitled (Emily Blathwayt watering Emmeline Pethick Lawrence's western red cedar), May 1909. Copyright *Bath in Time*, used with permission
- 8.3 Map of the Suffragettes' Wood, 2010. See the Appendix for more detailed information
- 8.4 Millicent Garrett Fawcett's tree planting ceremony, 3 July 1910. Photograph by Colonel Linley Blathwayt. Foreground, from left: Dr Mary Morris, Mary Blathwayt, Millicent Garrett Fawcett; on bench at rear: Annie Kenney, Jennie Kenney and Adela Pankhurst, looking out over the arboretum. Copyright *Bath in Time*, used with permission
- 8.5 General view of arboretum to east, c. 1910. Photograph by Colonel Linley Blathwayt. Copyright *Bath in Time*, used with permission
- 8.6 The leaves of a cotoneaster tree frame the Royal Crescent, Bath



Map of sites discussed in this book
Bath and surrounding area, including Bathaston. Drawn by the author

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particularly her lesson that creativity shared is creativity nurtured. The wings she tattooed on her back in support of this project astound me still. Although this book has a formal dedication, I would like to offer this book to her memory, as well as to the memory of my mother, Faith Rosalind Hammond (1937–2008), the first spatial artist I had the privilege to meet, and to the memory of Mary Frayling (1920–2011), for sharing her collection of photographs, plaques and memories about the Bath suffrage activities with me, and now, through her donation to Bath Public Library, to the next generation of scholars interested in writing the history of women in Bath.

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I saw a Lady stand at one corner and turn herself to the wall
and whisper [Her] voice came very clear

(Celia Fiennes, *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes, 1685–c.1712*,
ed. Christopher Morris, London: Macdonald, 1982, 191)

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Map of sites discussed in this book</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xiii</i>
Introduction: Getting to Bath	1
Part I Architects	
1 The winged architect and the gendering of architecture	29
2 Architecture and gender, or how Selina Hastings's gothic chapel came to serve the history of Georgian Bath	45
Part II Angels	
3 Falling women: The angels of Bath Abbey	71
4 Whispering walls: Artistic interventions as a means to trouble the architectural imaginary	101
5 "The ghost of Ladymead": The Bath Female Home and Penitentiary	129
Part III Activists	
6 "Every tree a staunch heart": The history of the Suffragettes' Wood	163
7 <i>The Suffragettes' Orchard</i> : Towards a description of research-creation	183

8	Beyond angels, beyond architects: Mapping the Suffragettes' Wood	201
	Conclusion: Leaving Bath – looking to the built past, on behalf of the lived future	225
	Appendix: Legend to Figure 8.3	233
	<i>Bibliography</i>	237
	<i>Index</i>	259

Introduction: Getting to Bath

You will probably fall in love with Bath. Most people do.
(1968 Official Guide Book to the City of Bath¹)

The ways to Bath are all difficult.
(Celia Fiennes²)

There are many approaches to Bath. A traveller could fly from the west, skimming the Bristol Channel like a nineteenth-century windjammer. Leaving anchor in the shipbuilding city of Bristol, the traveller would follow the River Avon eastwards through Somerset. Not long after leaving Bristol, sweetness rises from chocolate factories situated between Bristol and Bath. The landscape changes rapidly during the journey, from broad flat stretches of farmland to the round viridian shoulders of the Hercynian hills. About 12 miles east of Bristol, Bath appears suddenly on the lowlands banking the Avon. The visitor might come, alternatively, from the east, from London. Travelling through the marshy farmlands of Wilts, purple hills edge the horizon. At the western perimeter of Wiltshire green stretches of earth begin to heave beneath the traveller's journey. Trains speed through the one flat plain in this terrain, banking Bathampton Down, one of the seven hills that surround Bath.³ Receding suddenly, Bathampton gives way to a cinematic first view of Bath. Time appears arrested, as period Georgian architecture stretches away from the low green fields and playing grounds, scaling the hills with neither a shopping mall nor a high-rise in sight. As the train continues its curving approach to the city the pale ochre local stone begins to work visual magic. Streets of elegant, regular row houses climb hills at seemingly impossible angles.

A traveller might seek Bath too through the past. One of the first things the traveller will find, this way, is the narrowed lens of nostalgia. This is the preferred route, or reading of the city offered to tourists, who, on day trips from London or during short stays, are welcome to savour Bath's claims to the Georgian period and its nationally famed figures, such as Jane Austen, Mrs Siddons, Fanny Burney, Thomas Gainsborough, General Wolfe,



0.1 Aerial view of the Circus, 1754-68, linked by Brock Street to the Royal Crescent, 1767-75, designed by John Wood the Elder and John Wood the Younger. Photograph by Mandy Reynolds, 1981. Copyright *Bath in Time*, used with permission

William Pitt, and Sarah and Henry Fielding. Strolling through Bath's flagstone and cobbled streets, the visitor may summon that period, which dawned just as the seventeenth century began to wane, when the peerage began to visit Bath for long stays, to heal their ailments through bathing or drinking Bath's famous sulphurous waters. Through the long eighteenth century that followed (c. 1688-1830), they were accompanied or followed by speculative builders, companions, hangers-on, trained and untrained workers, courtesans, prostitutes, and eventually, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the middle class. In Bath the list of famous, temporary residents mingles with