

EXPLORING SACRED GEOGRAPHY

1. IS MASONIC ARCHITECTURE SACRED SPACE?

Presentation by Anthony Thorley

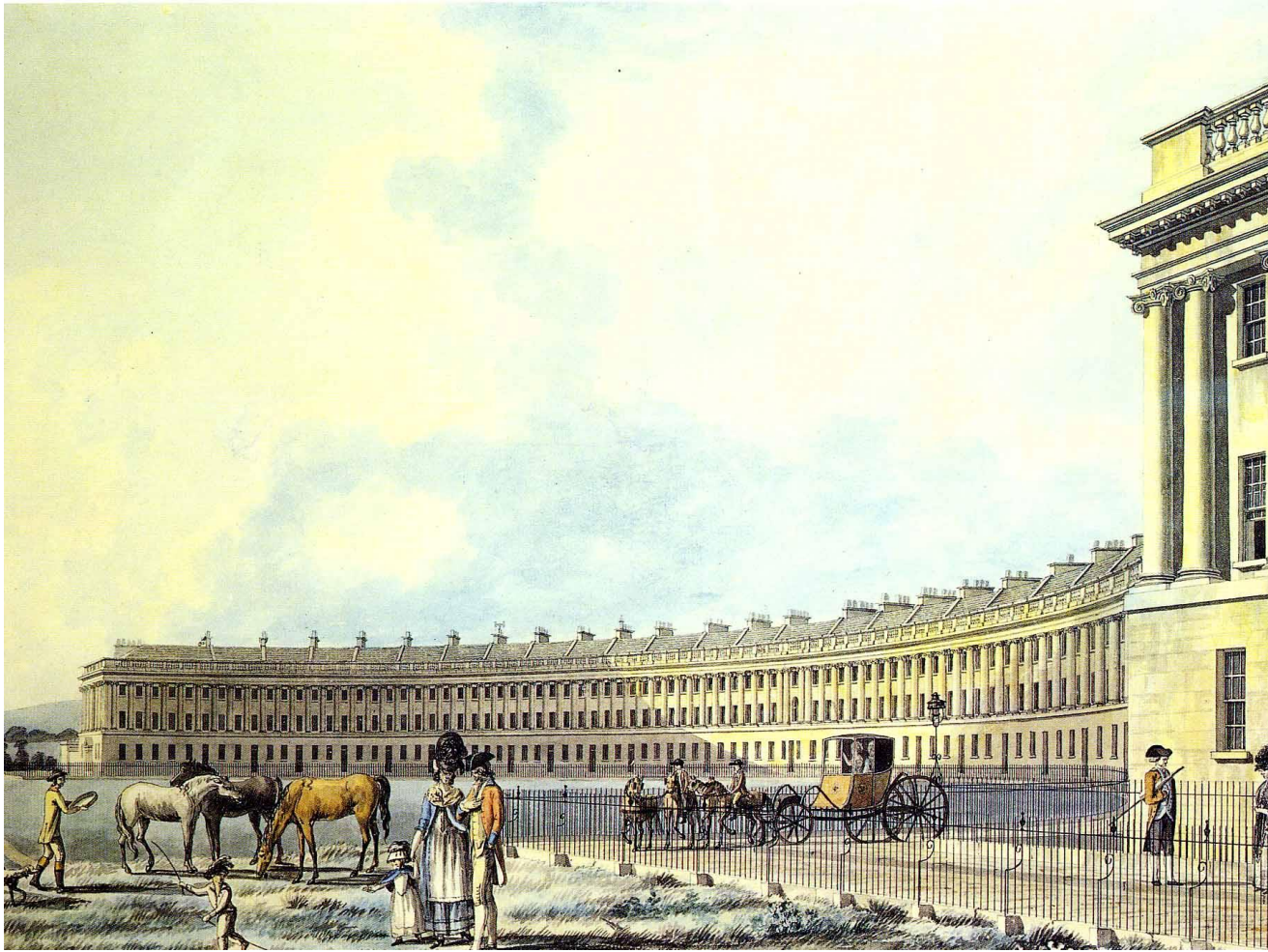
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November 7th 2013

University of Wales, Trinity St David

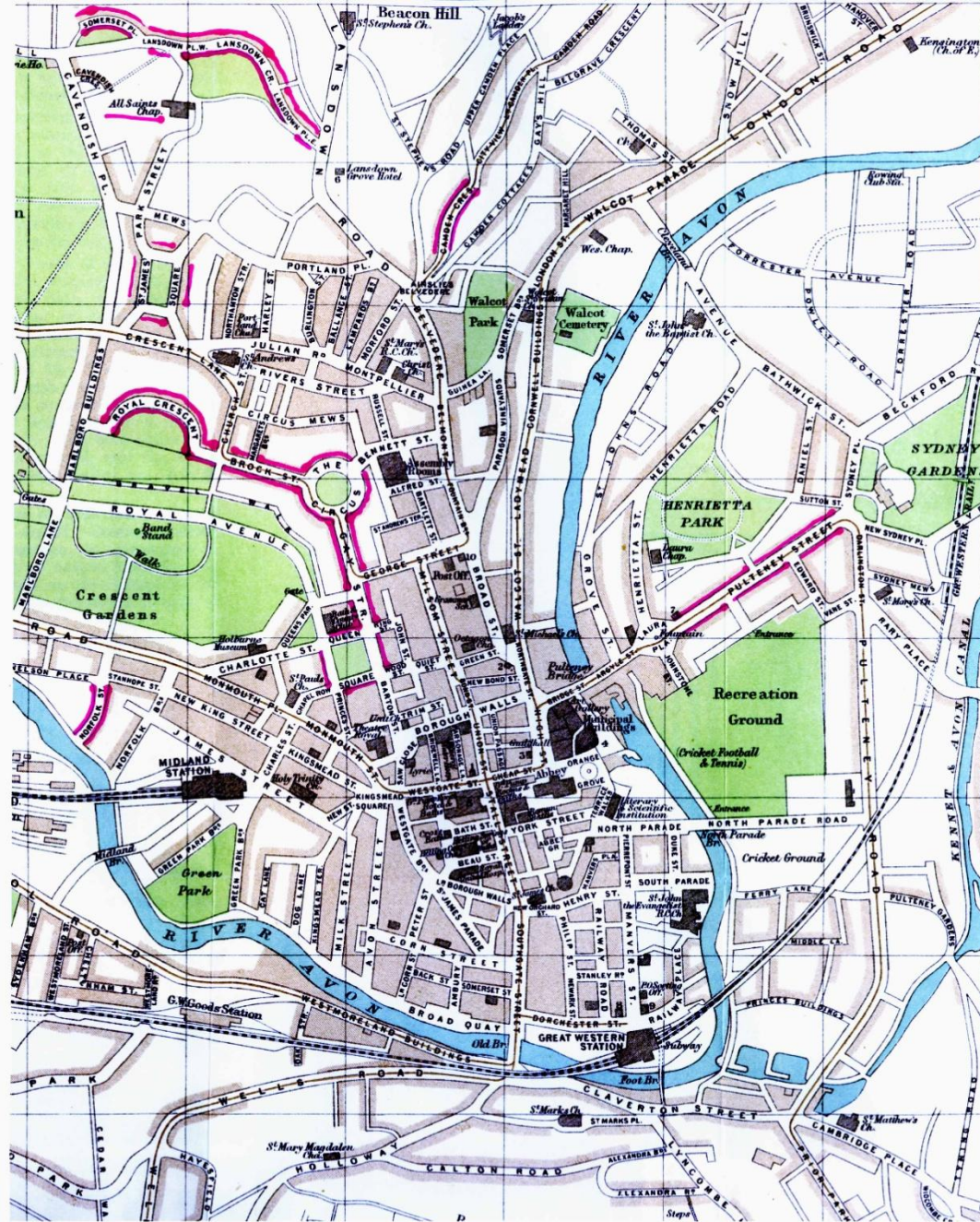






Royal Crescent, Bath (1767-1774)

Designed by John Wood junior



Map of Bath from 1908 showing Lansdown Crescent and All Saints Chapel
 All streets mentioned in the text are marked in red
 The side of a map square is 300 yards

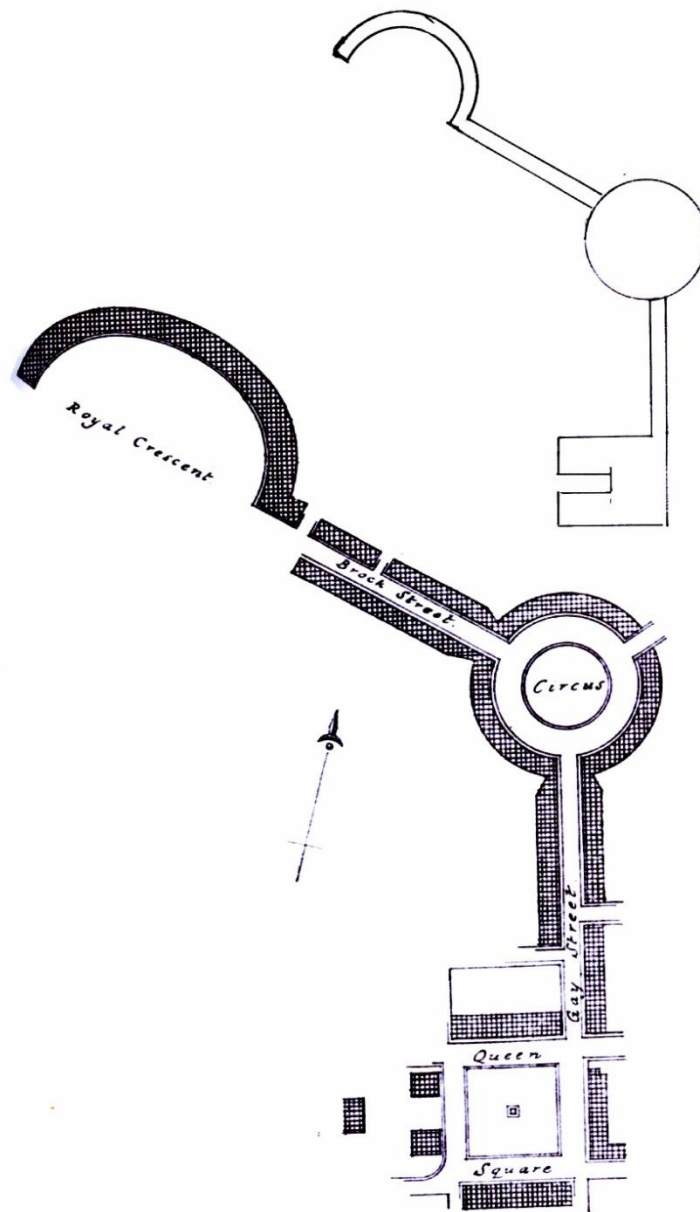
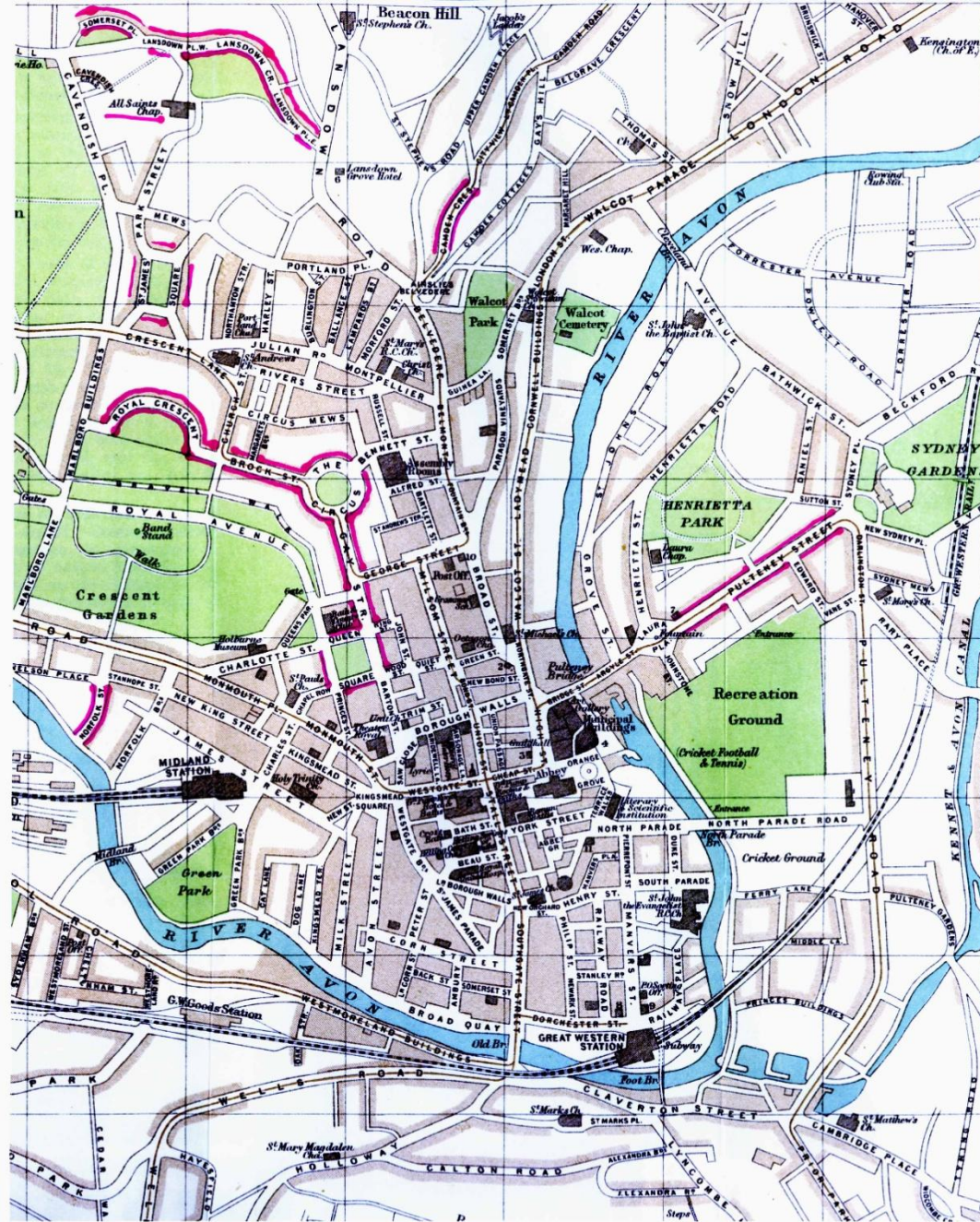


Fig. 5 Queen Square, Gay Street, The Circus, Brock Street and The Royal Crescent seen as keys.

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ANOTHER CRESCENT BUILDING IN BATH: LANDSDOWN CRESCENT

- This curving serpentine building dating from about 1792, overlooks the city of Bath from its northern heights.





Map of Bath from 1908 showing Lansdown Crescent and All Saints Chapel
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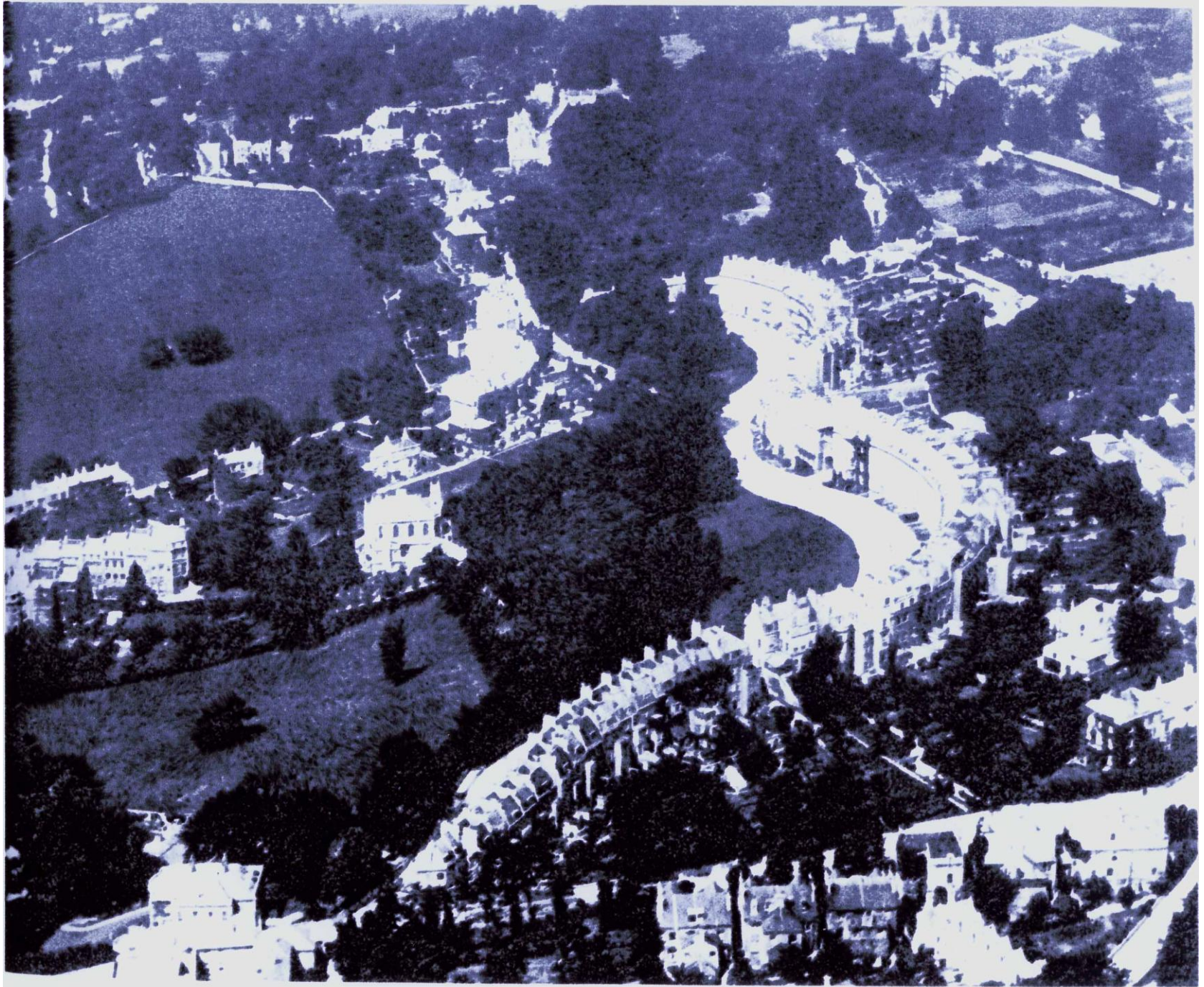


Fig. 20 The Crescent and Somerset Place from the east. A rare aerial view of the unbombed All Saints Chapel. From Bacon 1967.



Fig. 11 Views of Lansdown Crescent from the east (above) and west.



Fig. 3 Detail from a painting of 1789 by Thomas Barker, showing the artist with his patron, Charles Spackman, the speculator behind Lansdown Crescent. Taken from McCallum 2003.



Fig. 2 Detail of 'Lansdown Fair' painted in 1789 by Thomas Barker. The man standing holding a pipe is identified as John Palmer, architect of Lansdown Crescent. Taken from McCallum 2003.

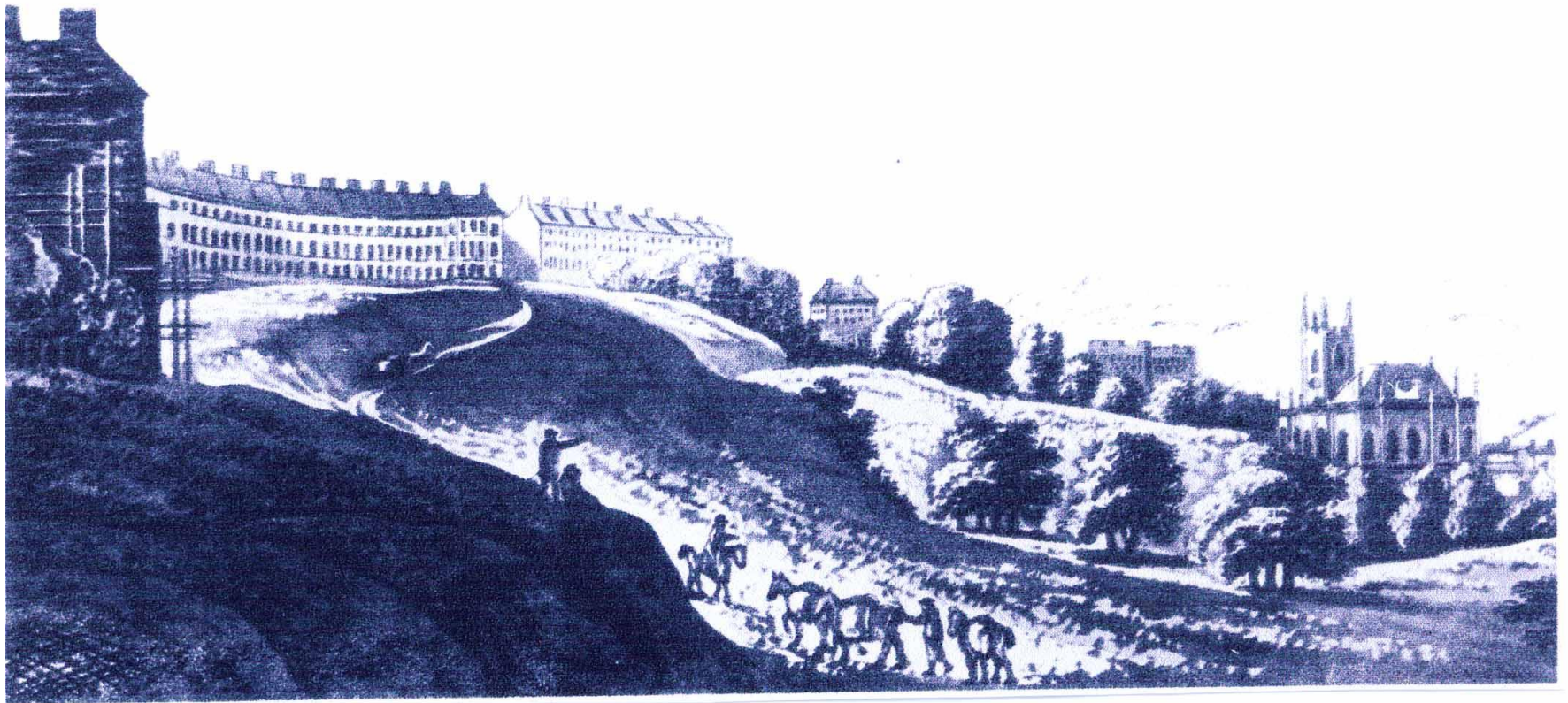


**Fig. 4 The still incomplete Lansdown Crescent in 1792
From Pound 1986.**

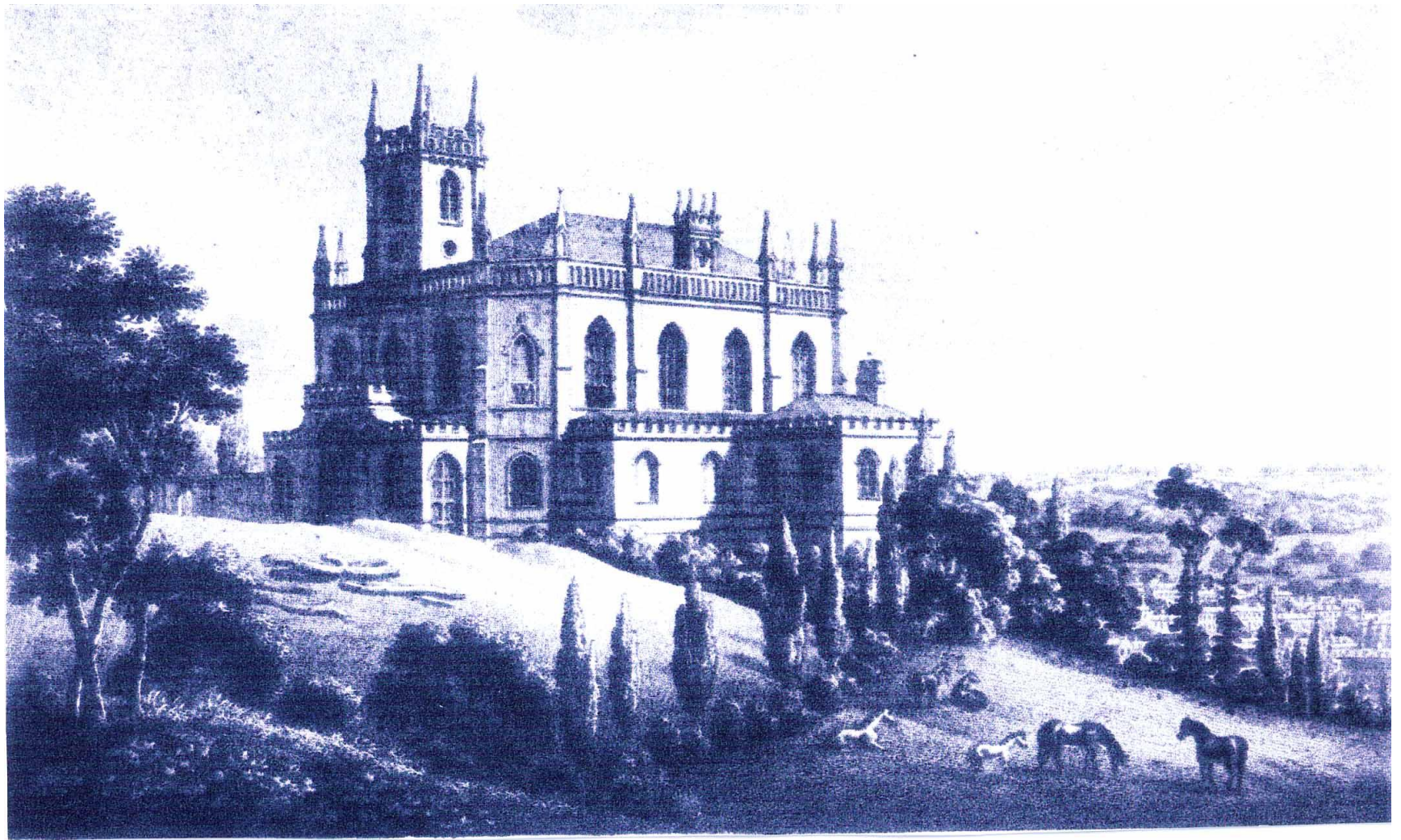
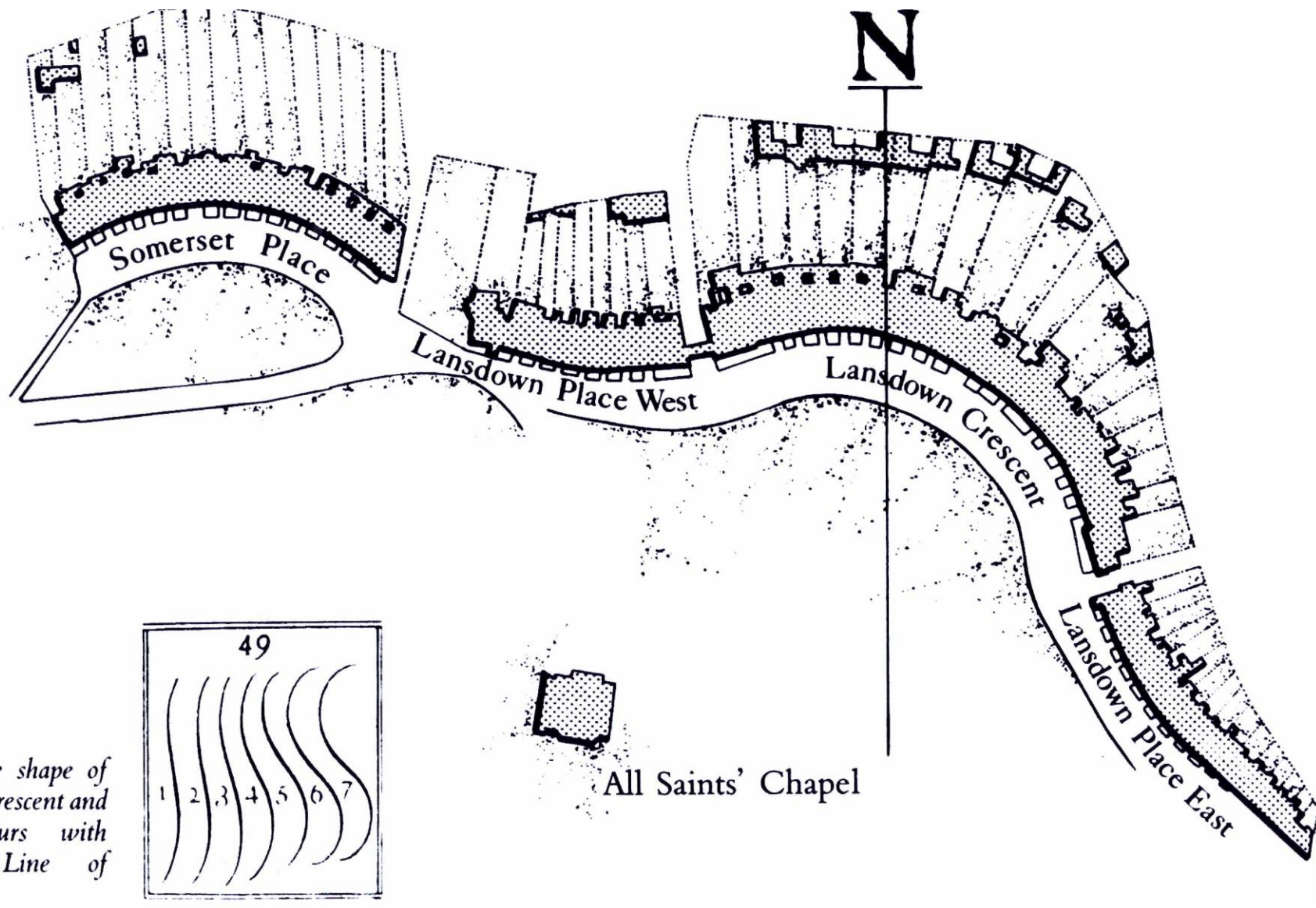


**Fig. 5 All Saints Chapel, Lansdown, in 1794
Engraving by W.Watts. From Ison 1980.**



RESPONSES TO THIS BUILDING

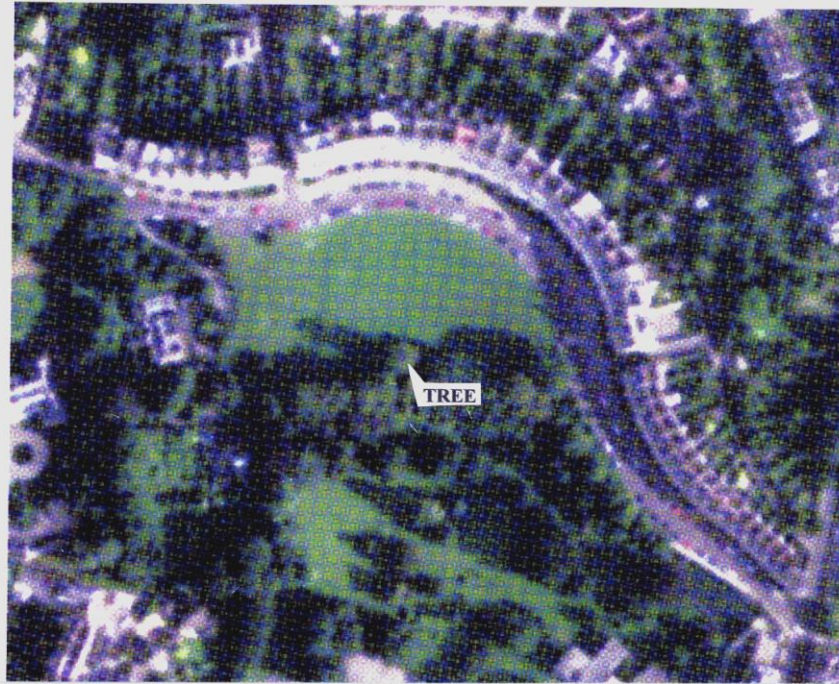
- One of the finest domestic buildings in Europe
- 'If the Royal Crescent is beautiful, Lansdown Crescent is sublime.' (Christopher Pound, 1986)
- 'A superb design under the Baroque influence... a sinuous progression through space'. (Edmund Bacon, 1967)
- 'Anticipates Art Nouveau....This row of houses cuts through the landscape like a whiplash.' (Robert Schmutzler, 1962)



*Compare the shape of
Lansdown Crescent and
its neighbours with
Hogarth's Line of
Beauty*

Fig. 21 Hogarth's Line of Beauty. Taken from Pound 1986.

WHY WAS THE CRESCENT SHAPED
WITH THIS SINUOUS CURVE?



Figs. 6 and 7 Showing the horse-chestnut tree from the air before 2001, and the stump with the protected new tree as it was in May 2005

Restorations of Masonic Geometry
and Symbolry Being a Dissertation on
the Lost Knowledges of the Lodge
(1905)



H.P.H. Bromwell

BROMWELL'S CONTRIBUTION

- Henry Bromwell (1823-1903) was a Democrat politician, an academic lawyer and a Freemason, fascinated about the way that Freemasons were losing touch with their roots in classical geometry.
- In his book, he presented many plans and designs of the Lodge Floor and indicated how Freemasonic rituals were enacted on the patterns and plans so designed.
- His 1905 book was made obligatory in all USA Lodges, but not put into the public domain until 15 years ago.

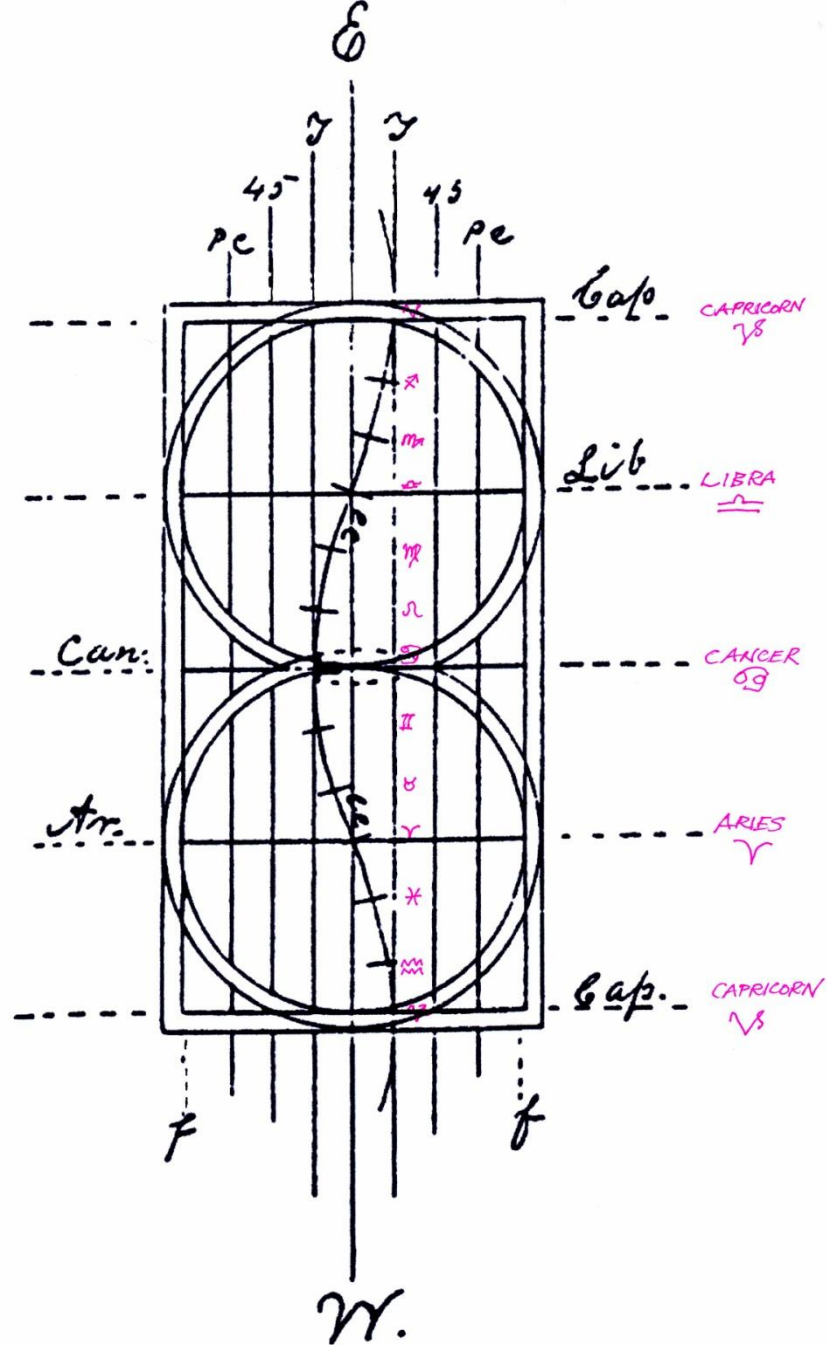


Fig. 23 Bromwell's plan of the masonic lodge floor representing the ecliptic.
Author's annotation of the zodiacal signs in red. From Bromwell 1905 p.130



Fig. 22 Lansdown Crescent's curves as representing the zodiacal ecliptic of the sun.

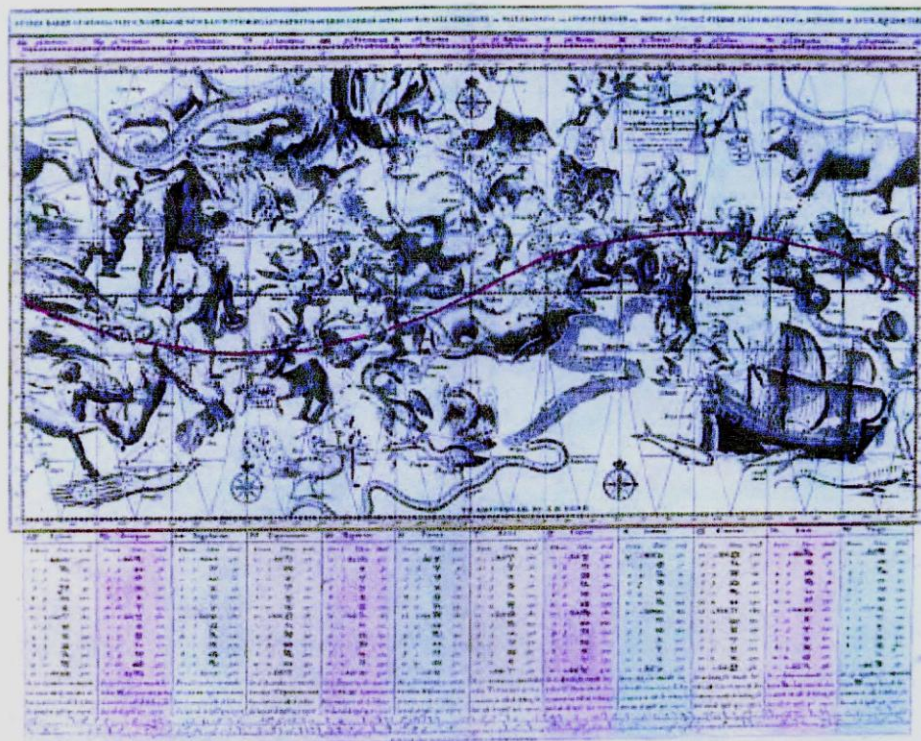
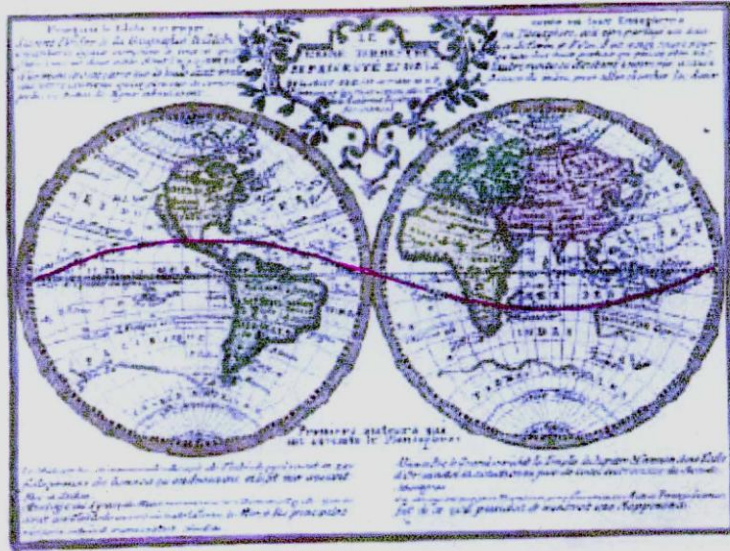




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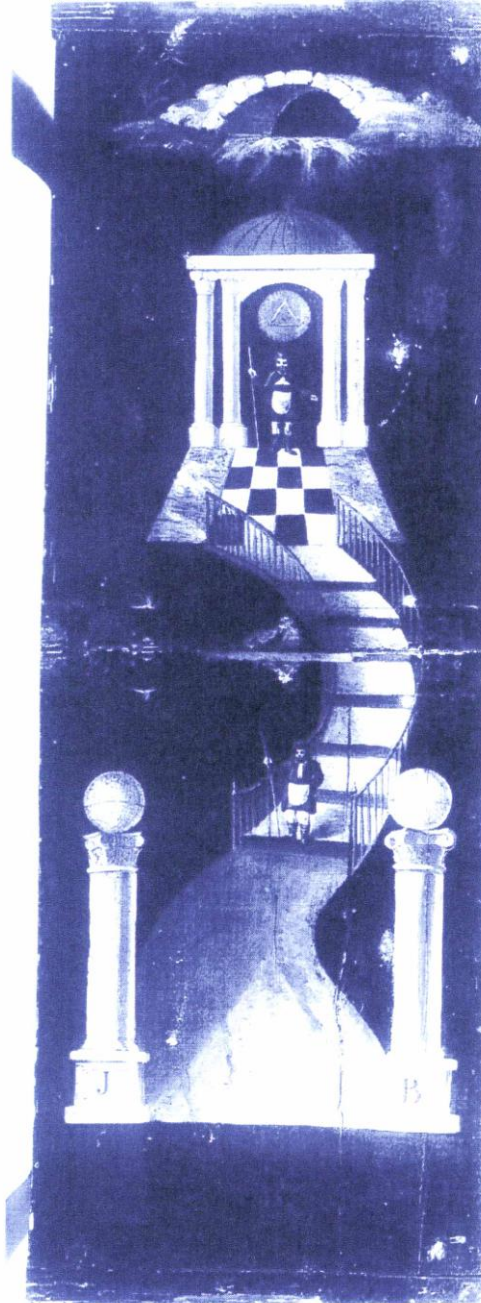


Fig. 26 This shows an early 19th century masonic second degree tracing board. The sinuous pattern of the pathway is suggestive of the path of the sun's ecliptic in a stylised form. A tracing board reflects the masonic lodge floor for each particular rite. The second degree is particularly associated with geometry and philosophy. From Curl 2002.

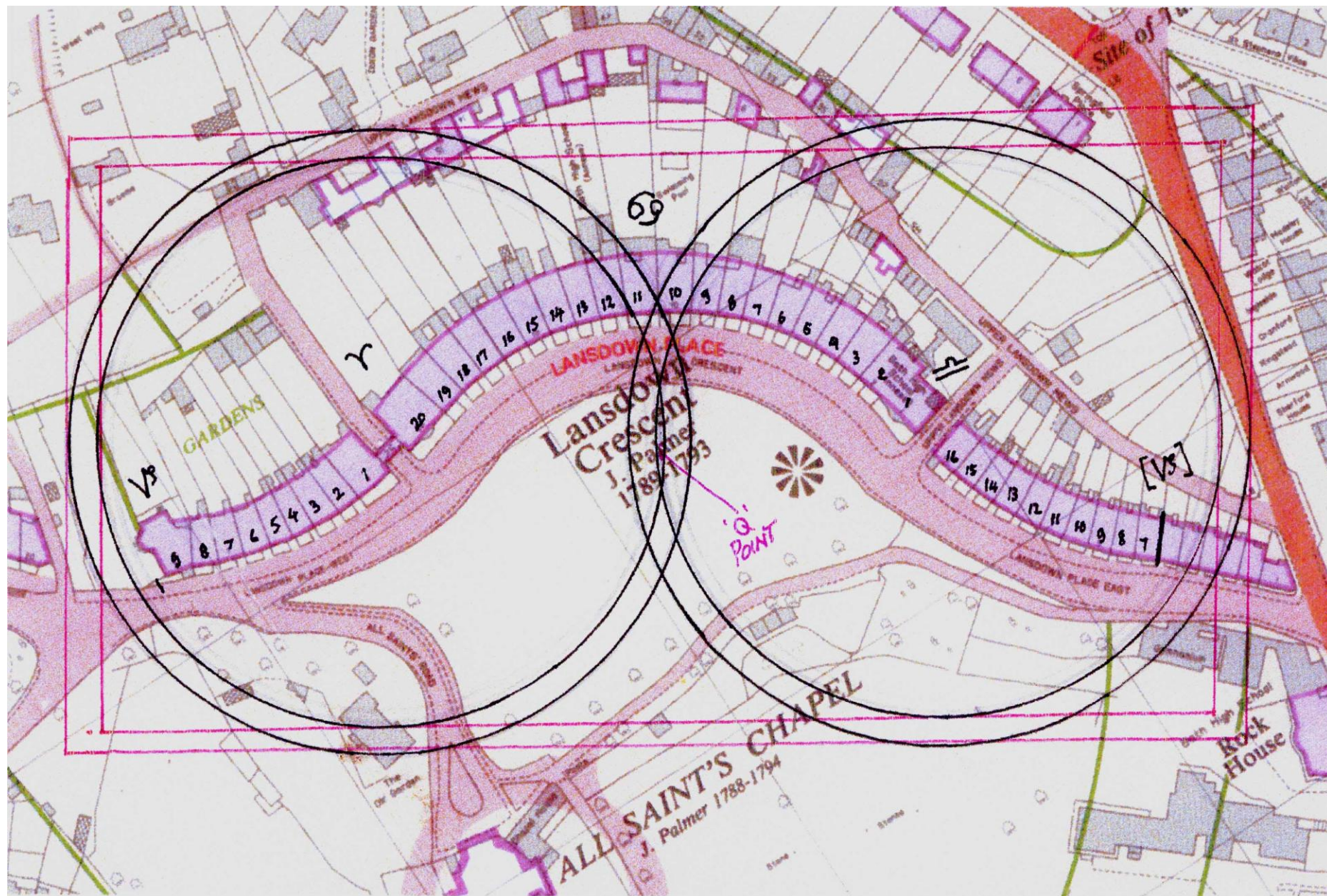


Fig. 22 Lansdown Crescent's curves as representing the zodiacal ecliptic of the sun.



Figs. 14 and 15 Showing No. 20, the western pavilion with a first floor bridge and No. 1, the unbridged east pavilion.



Figs. 12 and 13 Showing the pedimented central feature with Ionic pilasters, and in detail the guilloche scroll over the arched recess.



Fig. 22 Lansdown Crescent's curves as representing the zodiacal ecliptic of the sun.



Figs. 14 and 15 Showing No. 20, the western pavilion with a first floor bridge and No. 1, the unbridged east pavilion.

ARIES

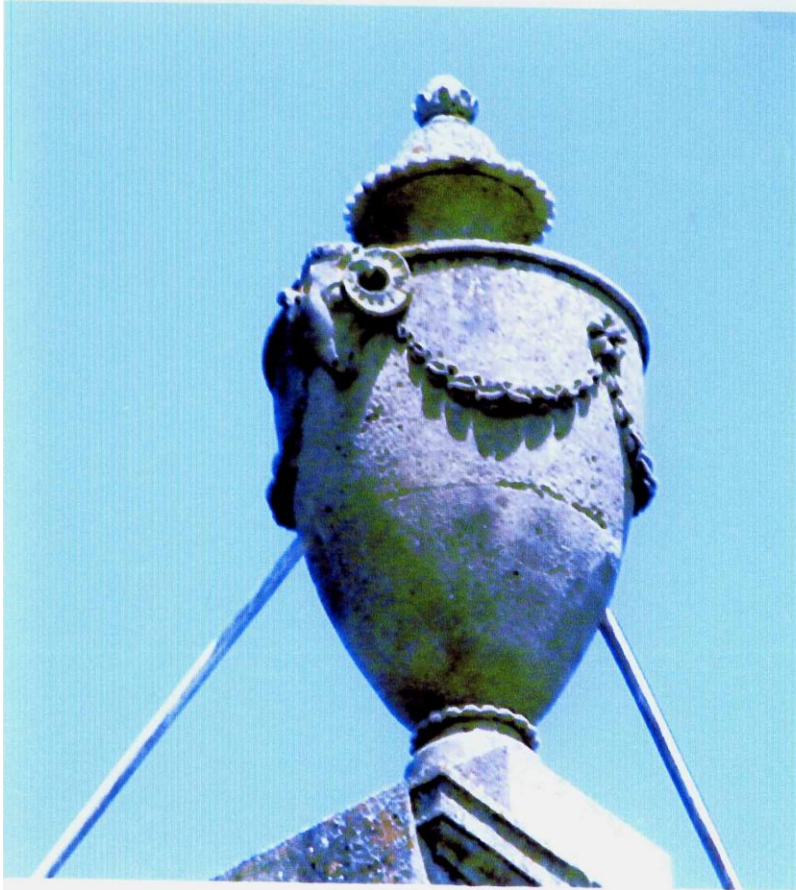


Fig. 27. The rams heads are clearly seen in a detail from the urns on house Nos. 1 and 20.
One of the urns is 20th century but the weathered one is an original.



Fig. 31 The shape of the ground plan of house No. 1 is the same as the sigil for Libra.



Figs. 12 and 13 Showing the pedimented central feature with Ionic pilasters, and in detail the guilloche scroll over the arched recess.

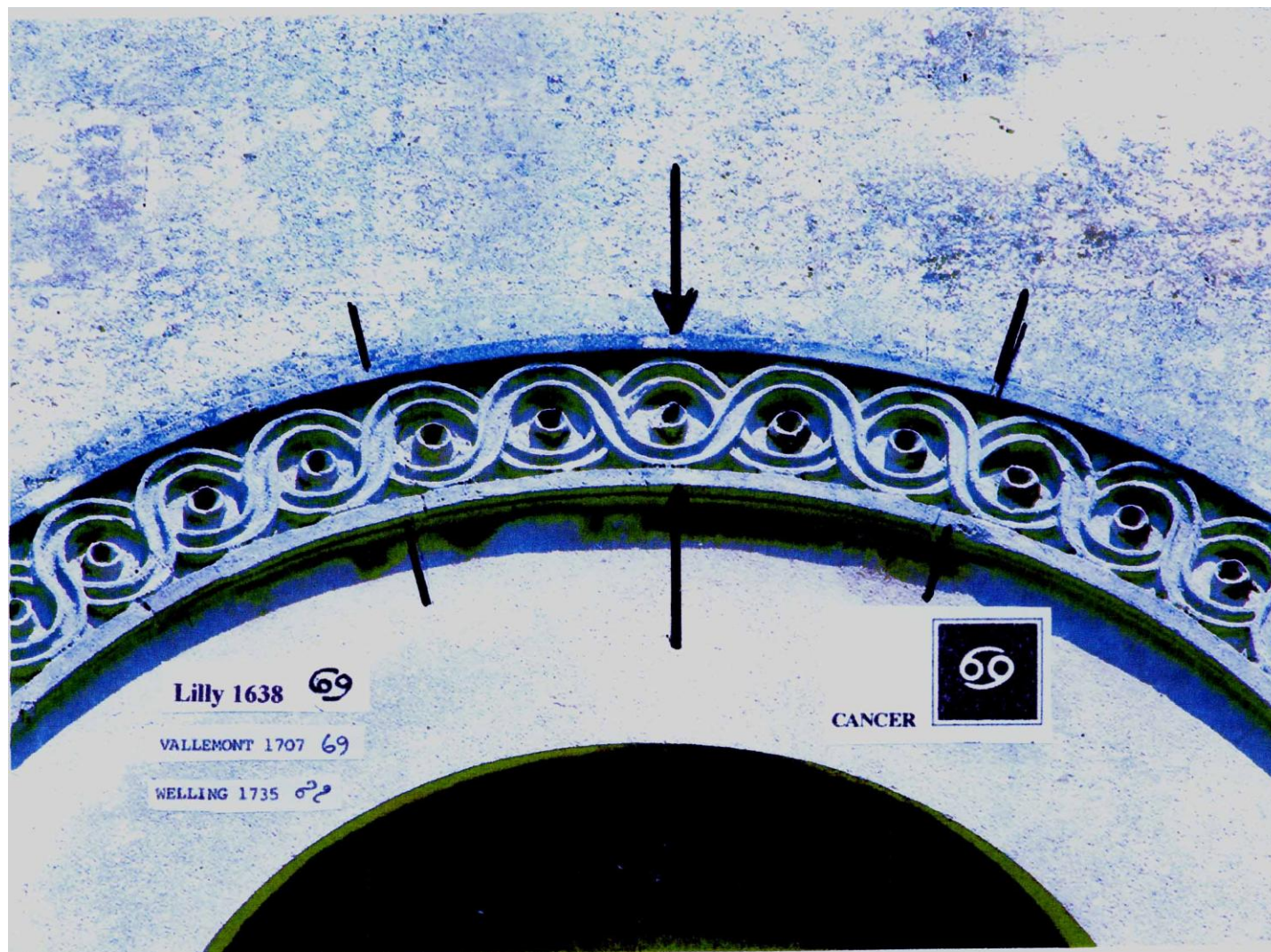


Fig. 29 A close-up of the central guilloché scroll and how the weave is broken for five points in order to emphasise the centre of the Crescent. It is possible that the guilloché centre-point also mimics the sigil for cancer.



Figs. 12 and 13 Showing the pedimented central feature with Ionic pilasters, and in detail the guilloche scroll over the arched recess.

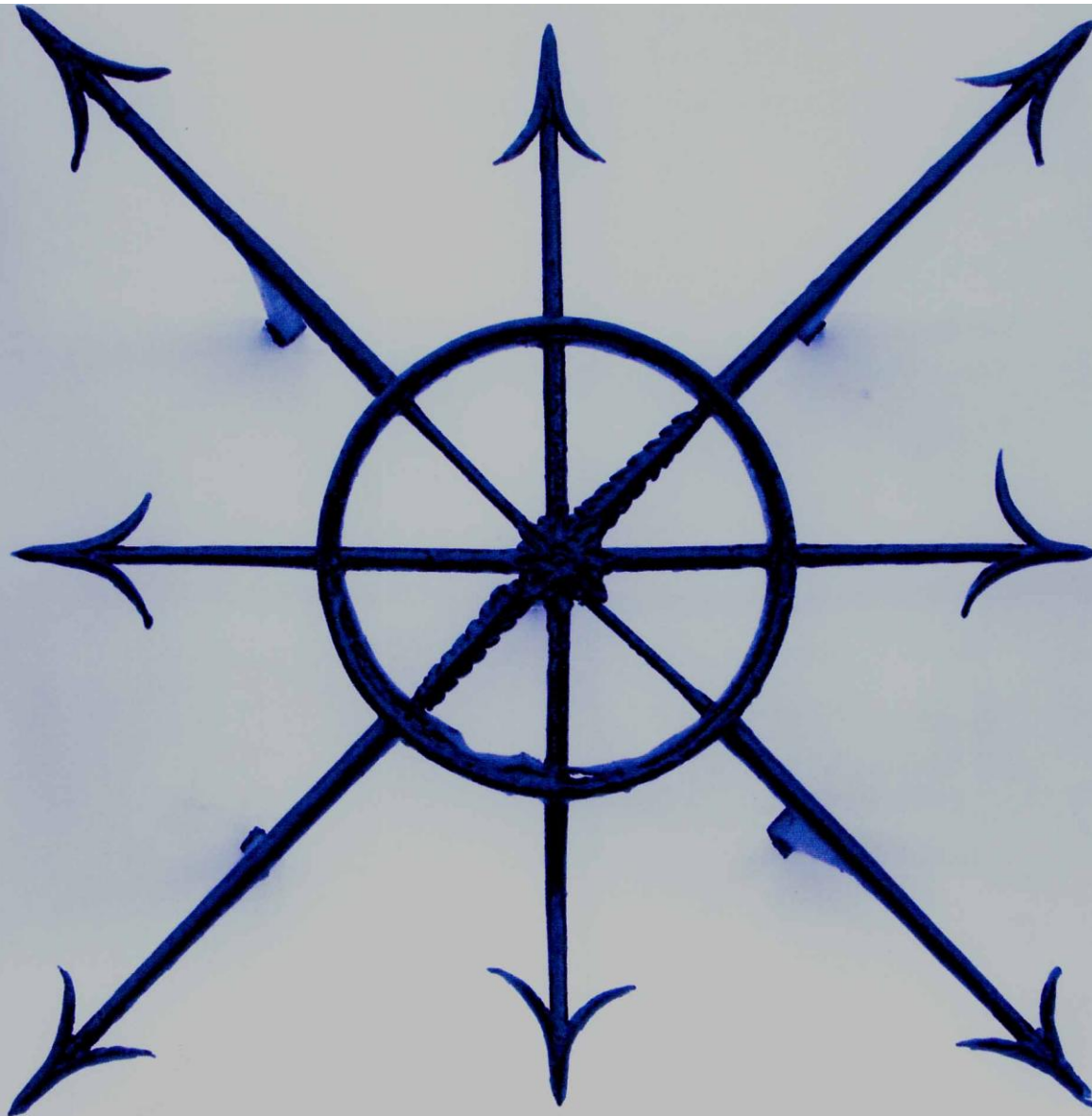
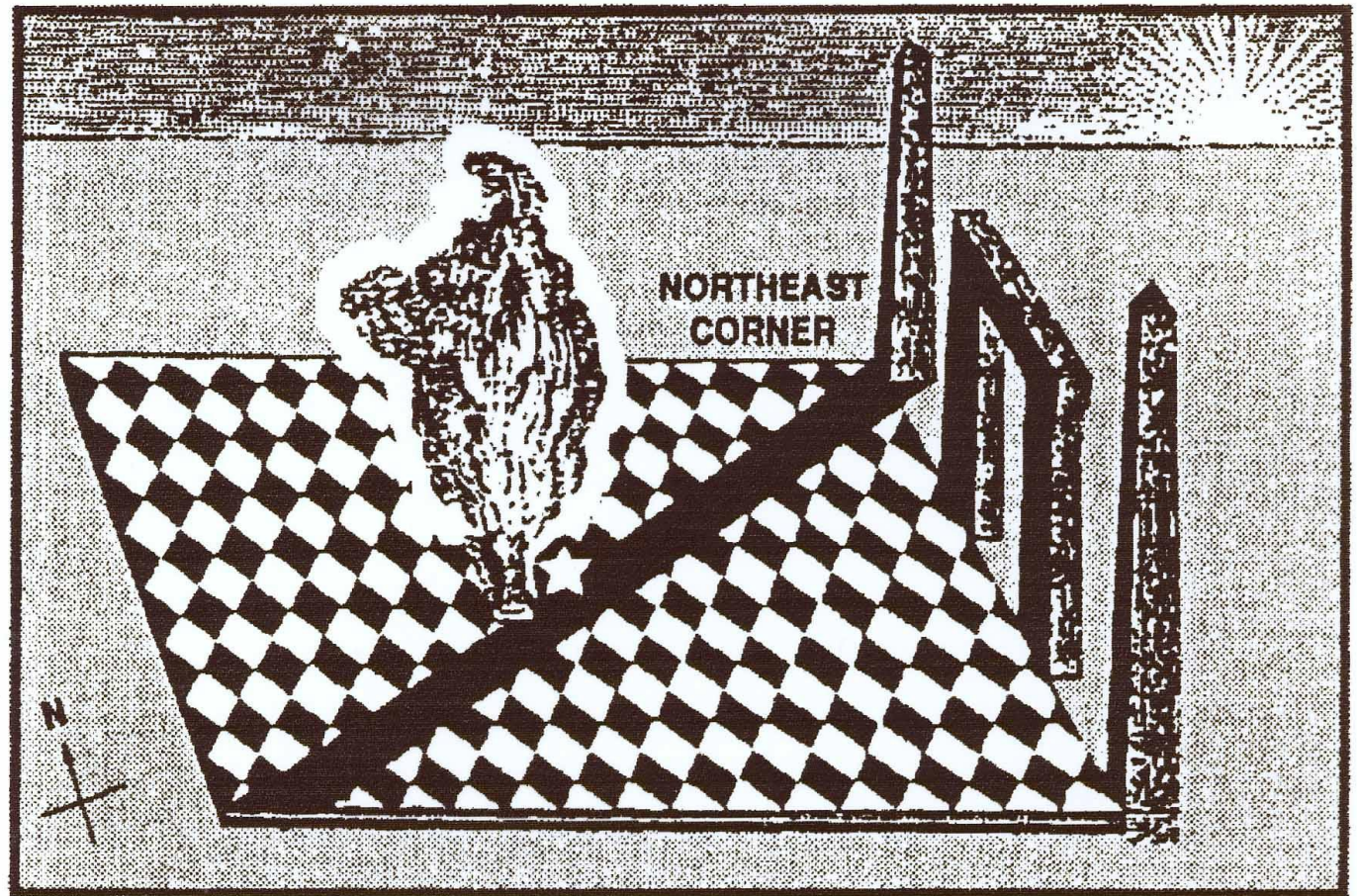


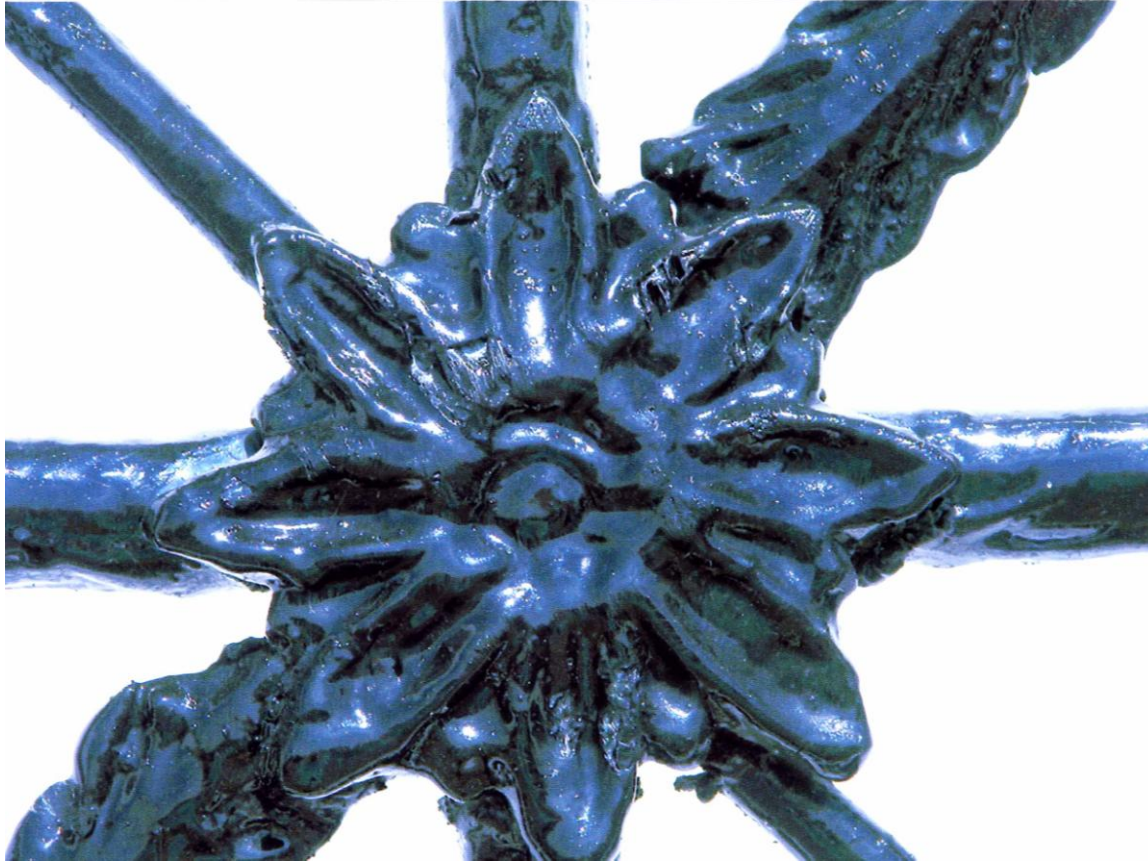
Fig. 28. The compass at the exact centre of the Crescent. Note how the feathering is only on the south-west north-east axis and so indicates the summer solstice or Cancer.

Stellar Theology and Masonic Astronomy

THE RISING
SUN OF THE
SUMMER
SOLSTICE



FROM R. H. BROWN 1882.



The Masonic Eye!

The all seeing Eye of Providence is an important Masonic symbol



Fig. 22 Lansdown Crescent's curves as representing the zodiacal ecliptic of the sun.



Figs. 16, 17 and 18 No. 9 Lansdown Place West, showing the angled frontage, the bows to the west and north of the house and the view from the west showing the prominent six-storied balconied bow.

LILLY 1638



LILLY 1647



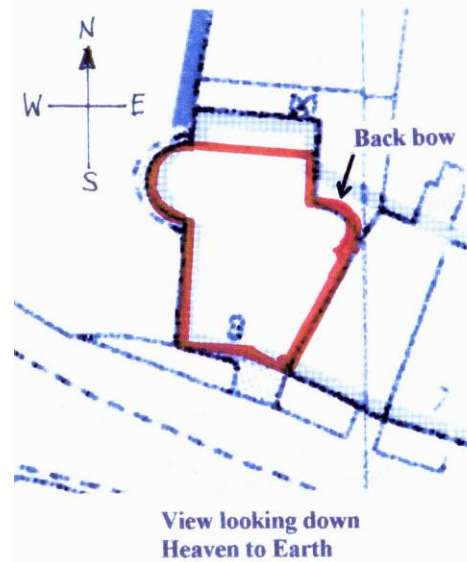
SIBLY 1790



LIZ GREENE 1986



CAPRICORN



Figs. 24 and 25 No. 9 Lansdown Place West is shaped remarkably like the sigil for Capricorn, particularly when viewed looking up. The sigils used by astrologers William Lilly and Ebenezer Sibly are shown for comparison. The strange and unique north-facing back bow emphasises the original house shape (in red) and is shown in detail.



A CONTRIVED CRYPTIC LANDSCAPE ZODIAC

WE CAN ONLY SPECULATE AS TO WHAT SIGNIFICANCE THIS MIGHT HAVE HAD FOR EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BATH FREEMASONS

A Contrived Cryptic Landscape

- A contrived cryptic urban landscape is created from the outset so as to be unrecognisable to all but those individuals who have been expressly exposed to or advised of the significance of its iconography in revealing its form and design. (Thorley 2005)
- (In this case 'those individuals' are Freemasons.)

Back to the original question...

- Is Lansdown Crescent, as Masonic architecture, sacred space?
- I approach answering this question from three perspectives, or arguments

1. AN ARGUMENT FROM CLASSICAL ORIGINS

- Space and place (Tilley and Bender etc.!)
- Cosgrove: a geographer interested in the 'Palladian Landscape'.
- Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) followed Vitruvius 'On Architecture' (27 BCE) to develop the Palladian style which reflects divine order.
- Speculative Geometry – honouring Platonic Forms
- Inigo Jones (1573-1653) through Lord Burlington (1694-1753) to John Wood (1704-1754) and Bath as a neo-Palladian city.
- 'In the works of the Divine Architect of all things, we find nothing but perfect figures, consisting of the utmost *Regularity*, the sweetest *Harmony*, and the most delightful *Proportion*'. John Wood, 1744. John Palmer (1738-1817) follows this tradition.
- Therefore, Masonic Palladian building and architecture is of its essence, such as Lansdown Crescent, is sacred space

2. IS FREEMASONRY A RELIGION?

- Three Definitions of Religion by:
- Durkheim (1912) – grounded in social realism
- Kishimoto (1961)– an operational definition
- Yinger (1970)- emphasising personal, social and social-structural aspects
- Although Freemasonry does not represent itself as a religion, it easily satisfies each of these three academic definitions as a religion
- It follows that its lodge temples are sacred places

3. ACADEMIC CRITERIA OF SACRED SPACE

- Explore contributions of Durkheim, Eliade, Cassirer etc
- Belden Lane's four axioms (2002) p.19 :
 1. Sacred place is not chosen, it chooses.
 2. Sacred place is ordinary place, ritually made extraordinary.
 3. Sacred place can be trod on without being entered.
 4. The impulse of sacred place is both centripetal and centrifugal, local and universal.
- On a balance of these criteria, Masonic architecture and design can be considered as sacred space

Topos and Chora, Chronos and Kairos: toward clarifying the sacred

- Topos (Aristotle) is point place, an inert container
- Choros (Plato) as place, carries its own energy, summoning its participants to a 'dance' of life
- Chronos is the repetitive ticking of a clock: inert time
- Kairos as time is an unrepeatable moment (cf astrology) of great significance
- Belden Lane (2002), p 39-41, suggests that to co-experience Choros and Kairos 'is truly to encounter wonder', to touch the sacred
- Worth thinking about!

