books. Vitruvius was nevertheless able to give us a very considerable insight into Roman architecture, much of it however dependent on the survival of built Roman remains.

These remains give us clues but are of necessity in an alien setting; even a well preserved temple like the Maison Carrée in Nîmes can convey little of its original impression. We see the surviving structures with different eyes. Perhaps we might come a little closer if we looked at paintings of buildings which were done not long after their completion; if we could see the building as the past saw it. I remember once asking Henry-Russell Hitchcock why he always used rather faded black and white slides in his lectures. He maintained that these were closer to some original view because as a rule they excluded the overhead wires, the buses and cars, the street and shop signs.

The complexities of the issue become evident in a seemingly trivial planning application to replace glazing bars at 25 Royal Crescent in Bath in 2000. The building is part of the great neo-classical Crescent by John Wood the younger built between 1767 and 1775. The typical elevational drawing of that period shows windows as either white or black; there is certainly no sub-division of the glass on the drawings. This was a convention which was widespread and pre-dated the work of both John Wood the elder and the younger. We know that contructionally the drawings were an impossibility since such large panes of glass did not exist and in any case the windows had to be openable. Contemporary pictures of Bath clearly show buildings with glazing bars on all the windows. Was the convention therefore purely one of convenience or did the dark openings represent some desirable simplification of the elevation that made the contrast between solid and void more obvious. Would John Wood in fact have welcomed the alterations that occurred in the Victorian period when large sheets of glass made it possible to have only a meeting rail on vertically sliding sashes? The openings were now closer to his drawing and therefore, on one argument, more correct. Even

Below
Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Piazza del Popolo 1746?–48?, etching from his *Vedute di Roma*

contemporary drawings are an uncertain and possibly untrustworthy guide.

What contemporary depictions do most successfully is to create a context and an atmosphere that is different, which may seem strange and may, hopefully, shock our too-expectant eye into an altered perception. Giovanni Battista Piranesi's etchings of Rome, his *Vedute di Roma*, issued from probably 1746 onwards, show the city in the middle of the 18th century. They include both ancient ruins and more recent renaissance buildings. A view of St Peter reveals that it was surrounded by unmade roads, had a horse trough nearby and washing hanging on the line. The same unmade roads and ruts are even clearer in the view of the Piazza del Popolo; beyond the Egyptian obelisk are the twin churches of 1662 by Carlo Rainaldi and the three axes into Rome marked as much by tracks made by coaches