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WILLIAM TALMAN: SOME STYLISTIC SUGGESTIONS

Giles Worsley

William Talman remains an enigma. John Harris in his short study *William Talman: Maverick Architect* (1982), still the only one on an architect whom Harris rightly says deserves a proper monograph, described working on him as “like trying to run up a down escalator. However hard and relentless the search nothing new appeared of any consequence.”¹ Harris was referring to the catalogue of Talman’s work which remains obscure. Since 1982 the only significant additions to that catalogue are Frances Harris’s demonstration that Talman designed Holywell House, St Albans, Hertfordshire, for the future Duke and Duchess of Marlborough in 1686 and John Harris’s discovery of confirmation among the Portland (London) papers in Nottingham University Library of his suggestion that Talman worked at Bulstrode Park, Buckinghamshire.² The purpose of this paper, however, is to make some suggestions about Talman’s use of architectural style, a subject which remains as confused as the catalogue of his work. Such a study is inevitably constrained by the uncertainty which surrounds the attribution of certain houses to Talman. It is also made difficult by the complete lack of any statements about style made by Talman. But some light is shed by the survival of a substantial number of his architectural drawings, particularly sketches and finished designs for rebuilt works.

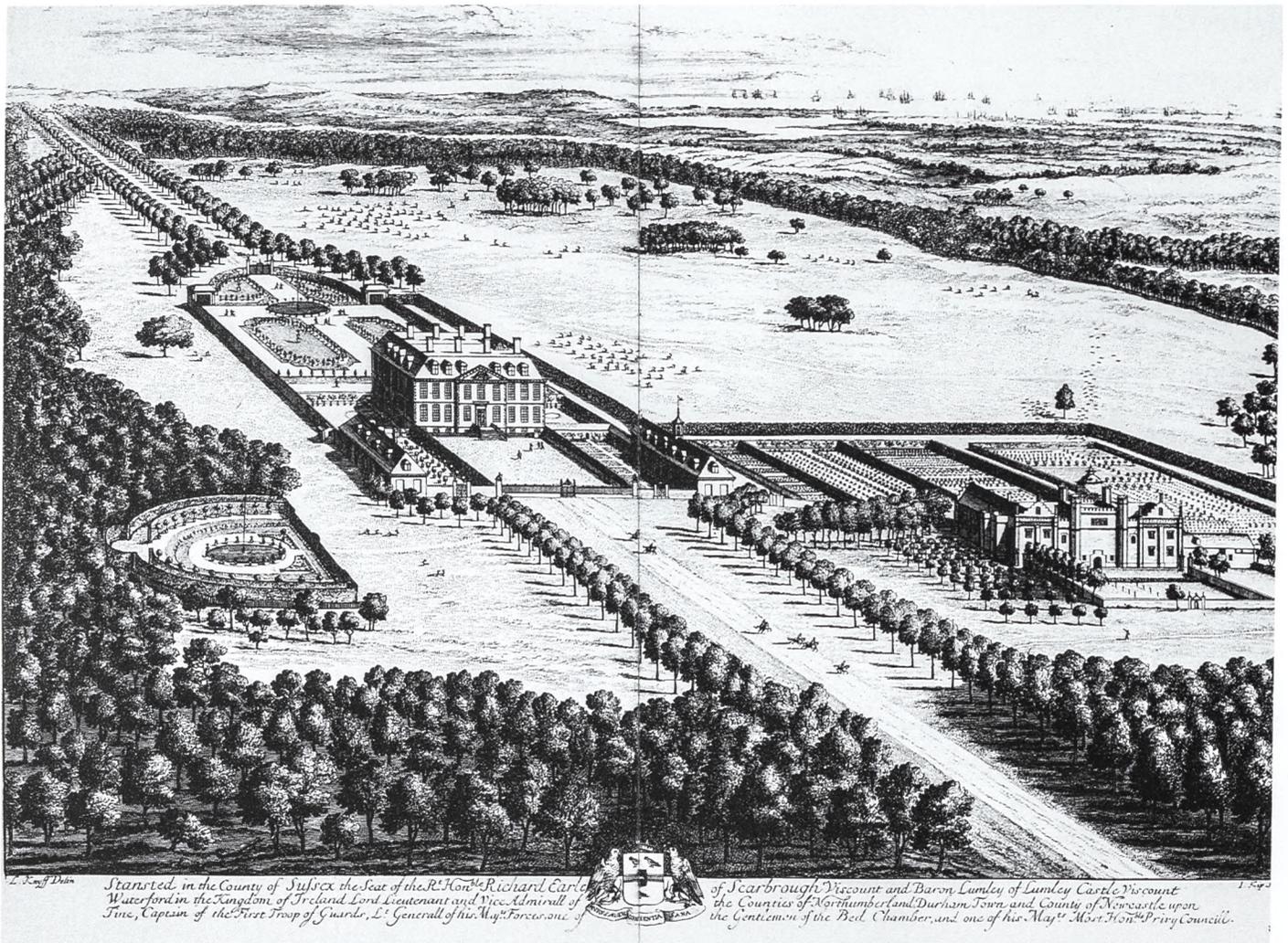


Fig. 1. William Talman. Stanstead Park, Sussex, 1686, from *Britannia Illustrata* (1707).

It is the fertility of his stylistic imagination that makes Talman's designs hard to grasp. There is an apparent eclecticism about his work which seems to have been abetted by his extensive library which he claimed in 1713 was "the most valuable Collection of Books, Prints, Drawings &c, as is in any one person's hands in Europe". But certain patterns can be identified.

The first is an astylar manner based on the style formulated by Sir Roger Pratt and Hugh May for houses of middling size. At Kingston Lacy, Dorset, and Horseheath, Cambridgeshire, both begun in 1663, Pratt had established a standard design for the country house — a double-pile, two-storey, tripartite, pedimented house with raised basement, hipped roof and dormers — which can be seen as the standard pattern for larger country houses in the decades after the Restoration. Its popularity can be judged in *Britannia Illustrata* (1707) which has seven examples ranging in date from 1670 to 1692 making it easily the most characteristic type of new house, a type which seems to have been designed by a wide range of architects.

Two of the houses in *Britannia Illustrata*, Stanstead Park, Sussex, (Fig. 1) built in 1686 for Lord Lumley, later 1st Earl of Scarborough, and Uppark, Sussex, built about 1690 for Lord Grey, later Earl of Tankerville, were attributed to Talman in J. Dallaway's *Western Division of Sussex* (1815). Documentary proof to confirm these attributions has never been forthcoming, although Talman is an improbable architect for Dallaway to have cited at this date without good reason, and Harris suggested they should be eliminated from Talman's *oeuvre* as they lacked the quirkiness he identified in his work. However, the discovery that Holywell House is by Talman shows that he was quite capable of designing in Pratt's astylar manner, and there seems no reason why he should not have been responsible for Stanstead and Uppark.³ They may contrast with his more elaborate style elsewhere, but much must have had to do with the degree of ostentation desired by the client. For a straight-forward, reasonably-priced, medium-sized house the Pratt manner was ideal. Two other houses, both designed about 1700, should be added to this group, Kimberley Hall, Norfolk, built for Sir John Wodehouse and Fetcham Park, Surrey, built for Arthur Moore. Fetcham has four bays in its flanking ranges rather than Uppark and Stanstead's three, but the chief difference is that both Fetcham and Kimberley have an extra half storey and no dormers. It may be coincidental, but Sir Christopher Wren adapted the Pratt

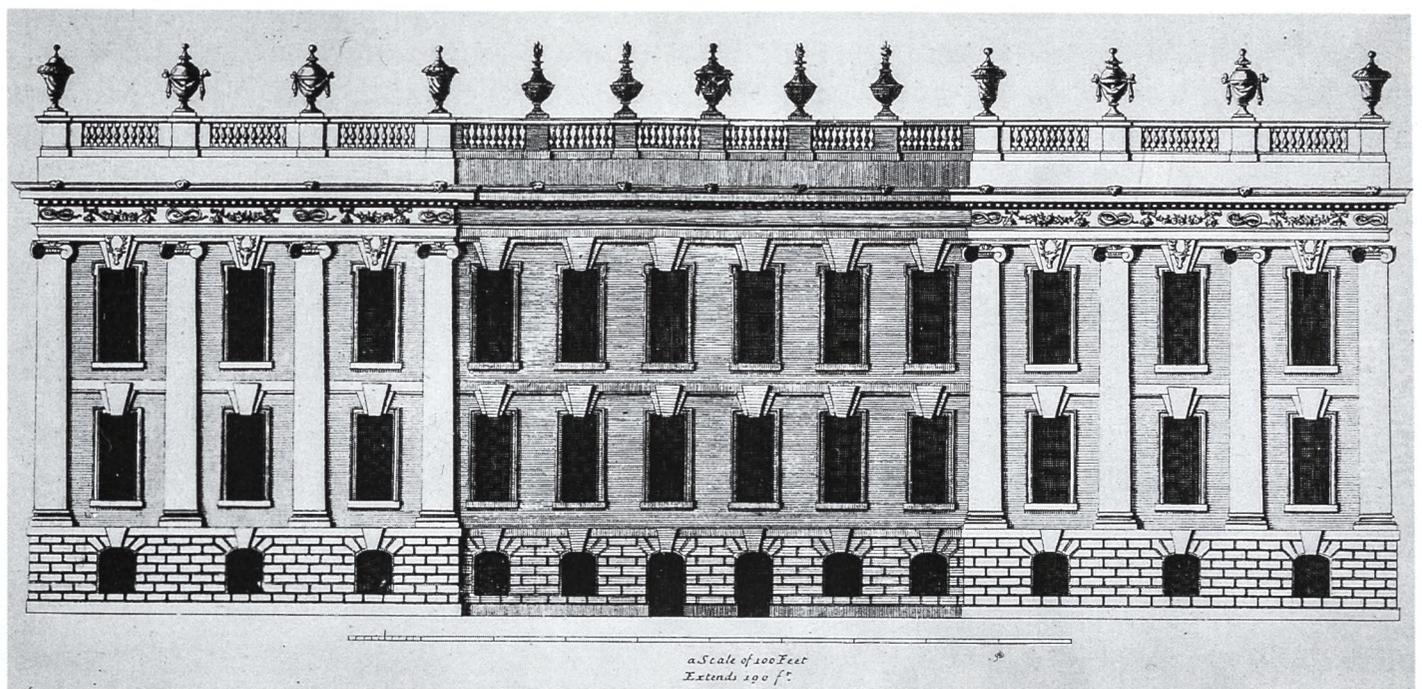


Fig. 2. William Talman, the south front of Chatsworth, Derbyshire, 1687, from *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715).

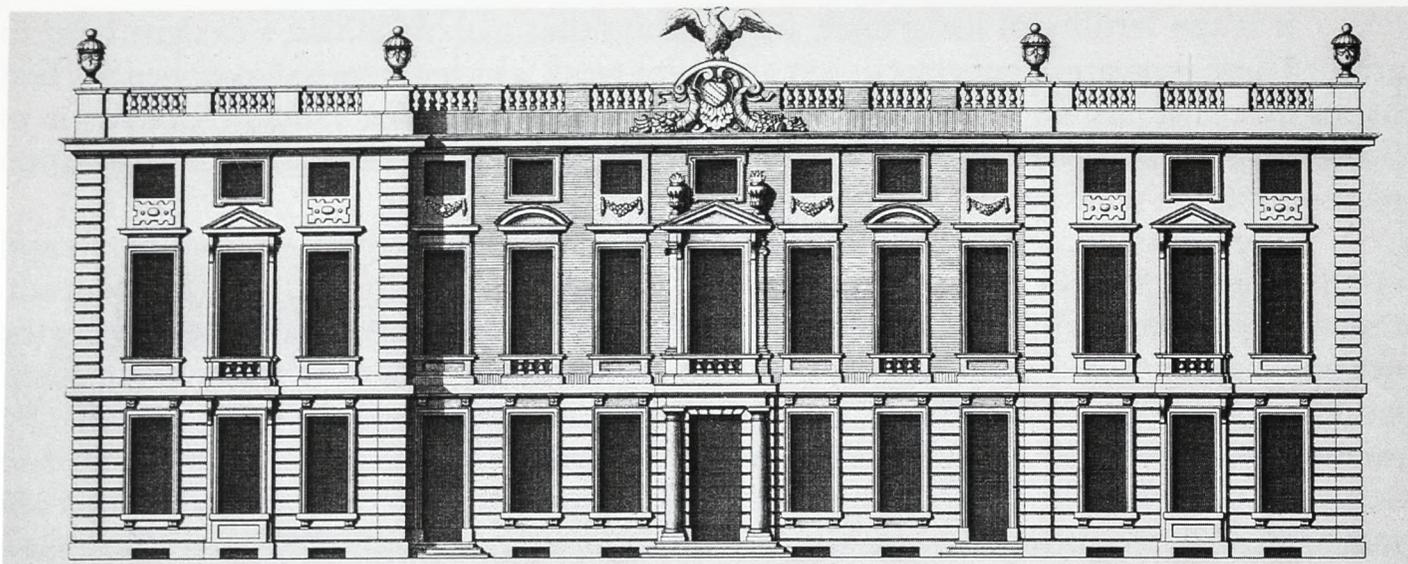


Fig. 3. William Talman, the entrance front of Dyrham Park, Avon, 1698, from *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1717).

manner in exactly the same way at Winslow Hall, Buckinghamshire, in 1699-1702.

Very different to these plain houses are Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, (Fig. 2) where Talman rebuilt the south front from 1687 for the Duke of Devonshire, and Dyrham Park, Avon, (Fig. 3) where he added the east front for William Blathwayt, William III's Secretary of State, from 1698 to 1704. These two houses, the one built for one of the country's grandest aristocrats, part of a veritable "palace in the Peak", the other for a leading politician, were designed for show. The austerity of the Pratt-type house would not have served these clients' purposes, nor would its compact plan have allowed for the key feature in both houses, a newly-fashionable state apartment.

The state apartment, which became established in grand English aristocratic houses in the 1670s, was an essential feature of any country house that aspired to first rank in the last two decades of the 17th century. The difficulty was that the long sequence of rooms — great dining chamber, ante-chamber, withdrawing chamber, bedchamber and closet at Chatsworth, at Dyrham there was no great dining chamber — caused problems in a symmetrical house. Ideally two state apartments would balance each other on either side of a central hall, as was being achieved at Petworth House, Sussex, at the same time, but this called for a building of enormous size. At Chatsworth Talman came up with a solution to this dilemma by placing the state apartment across a whole range. However, this meant that the Pratt-ideal of symmetry about a central point had to be abandoned. Instead, as the most important rooms were now at the two ends — the bedchamber and the great dining chamber — these were emphasised by slightly projecting pavilions. The less important rooms in the centre were undifferentiated. The same formula was repeated at Dyrham which again has three-bay projecting pavilions at each end. However, a slight accent was needed in the centre to mark the front door.

But if the basic form of these two façades can be explained by the demands of accommodating a state apartment, what was the source of the decoration? Perhaps surprisingly, Talman seems to have based these on motifs taken from two English buildings of the 1650s and '60s, Thorpe Hall, Cambridgeshire, (which Talman would have known from his visits to Milton House, which is just over a mile away, when drawing up plans for a proposed rebuilding in 1688) and Greenwich Palace.

The state apartment was essentially a royal concept. It was derived from royal palaces and the ideal occupant would be the King on a visit. It made sense, therefore, when searching for an appropriate style to express this grandeur for Talman to turn to Webb's

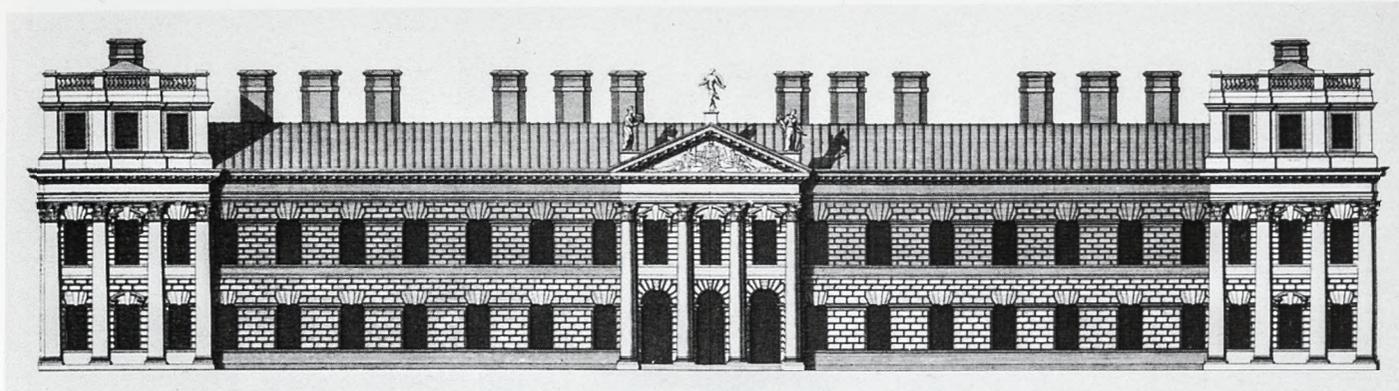


Fig. 4. John Webb, The King Charles Block, Greenwich Palace, 1664, from *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715).

King Charles range at Greenwich, (Fig. 4) the one architecturally impressive Classical royal palace, even if it remained unfinished. This is dominated by three-bay pavilions with giant pilasters. Such giant pilasters were later to become commonplace in English architecture but appear not to have been used between Webb at Greenwich and Talman at Chatsworth. The south front at Chatsworth can be read as a reduced version of Webb's range at Greenwich, without the attics (which would have been overbearing on the west front) or rustication and with the centrepiece removed because there was only one apartment to express, but retaining the essential idea of three-bay, giant-pilastered end pavilions, two floors of equal height and emphatic keystones over all the windows. It may be that the plainer wall surface and the more modest use of an Ionic rather than a Corinthian order was intended by Talman to present this building in a minor key, distinguishing it from the genuine royal palace according to the principle of *convenance* or decorum. If Talman did take Greenwich Palace as his model he may have done so partly under the mistaken belief that it was designed by Inigo Jones; that was certainly the understanding of Colen Campbell who declared that it was "executed by Mr Webb, from a Design of his great Master Inigo Jones".⁴

One can perhaps also suggest that Talman's design for Welbeck Abbey (Fig. 5) in Sir John Soane's Museum looks back to Greenwich, not this time in the details but in its general form with a three-bay pedimented centrepiece, three-bay end pavilions with emphatic cornices and long, two-storey ranges in between.

What would appear to be the essential source for the west façade at Dyrham is even more surprising. The basic articulation, two and a half stories with the windows linked vertically by aprons, with an emphatic plat band above the ground-floor windows and an alternating pattern of architrave and pediment above the first-floor windows, is identical

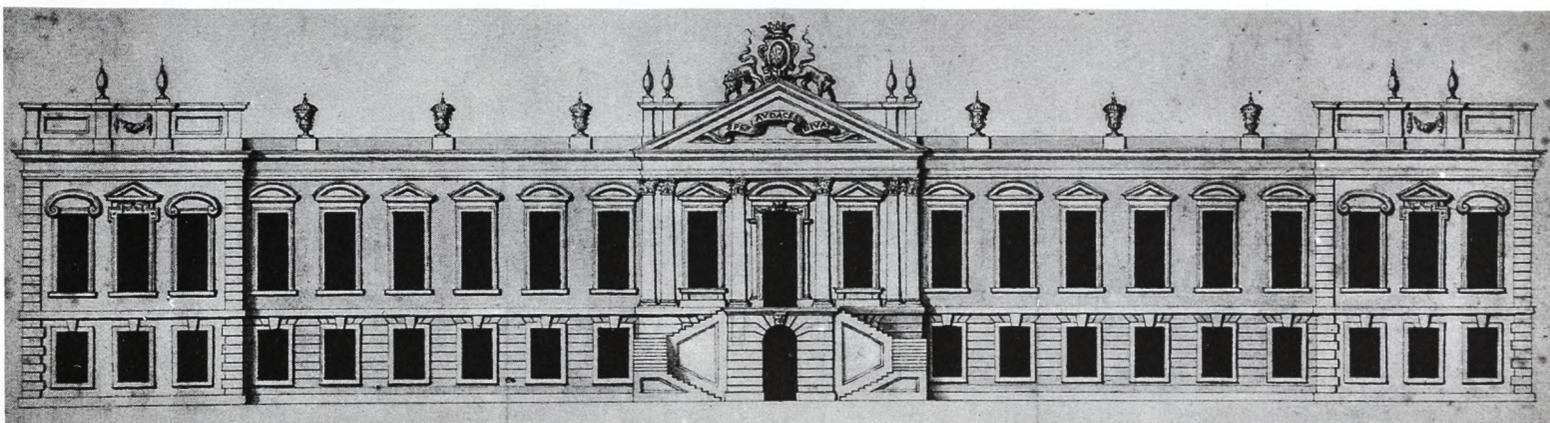


Fig. 5. William Talman, design for Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire, 1703 (Sir John Soane's Museum).

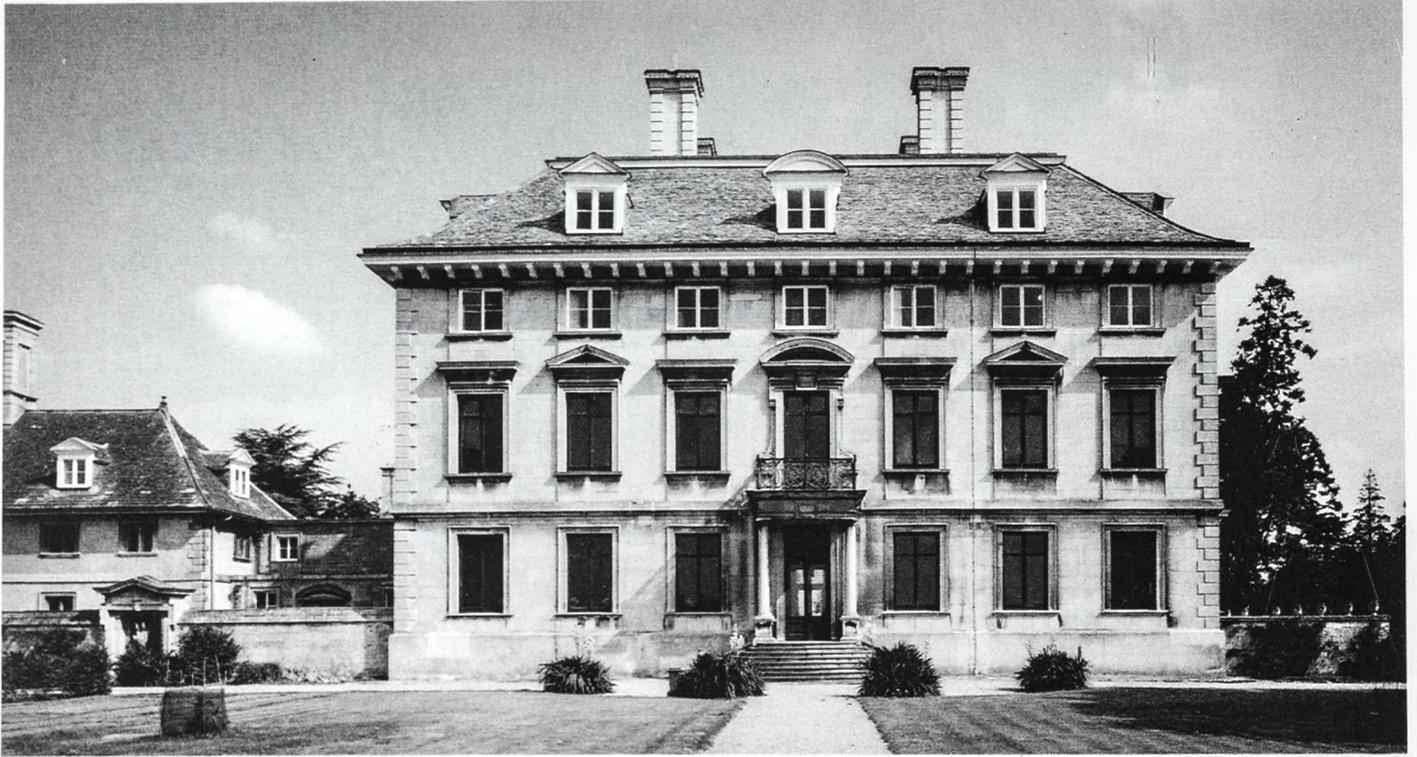


Fig. 6. Peter Mills, Thorpe Hall, Cambridgeshire, 1653 (*Country Life*).

with that at Thorpe Hall (Fig. 6). This is clear if the three bays of the end pavilions at Dyrham are compared with three bays at either end of Thorpe Hall. There are changes, the hipped roof has been replaced by a balustrade, the alternating quoins have been replaced by French-influenced straight quoins popular in the first decades of the 18th century and the ground floor has been given French-style channelling, but the similarity is remarkable. As Nicholas Kingsley has shown, the decoration under the second-floor windows comes from Rubens's *Palazzi di Genova*. It may also be that the unmoulded piers and *oeuil-de-boeuf* windows of the end bays of the stables at Dyrham are derived from a similar feature on the stable wing at Thorpe Hall. Little is known about attitudes to Thorpe Hall in the late 17th century, but if Chevening could have been thought to have been designed by Inigo Jones then the same may have been true of Thorpe.

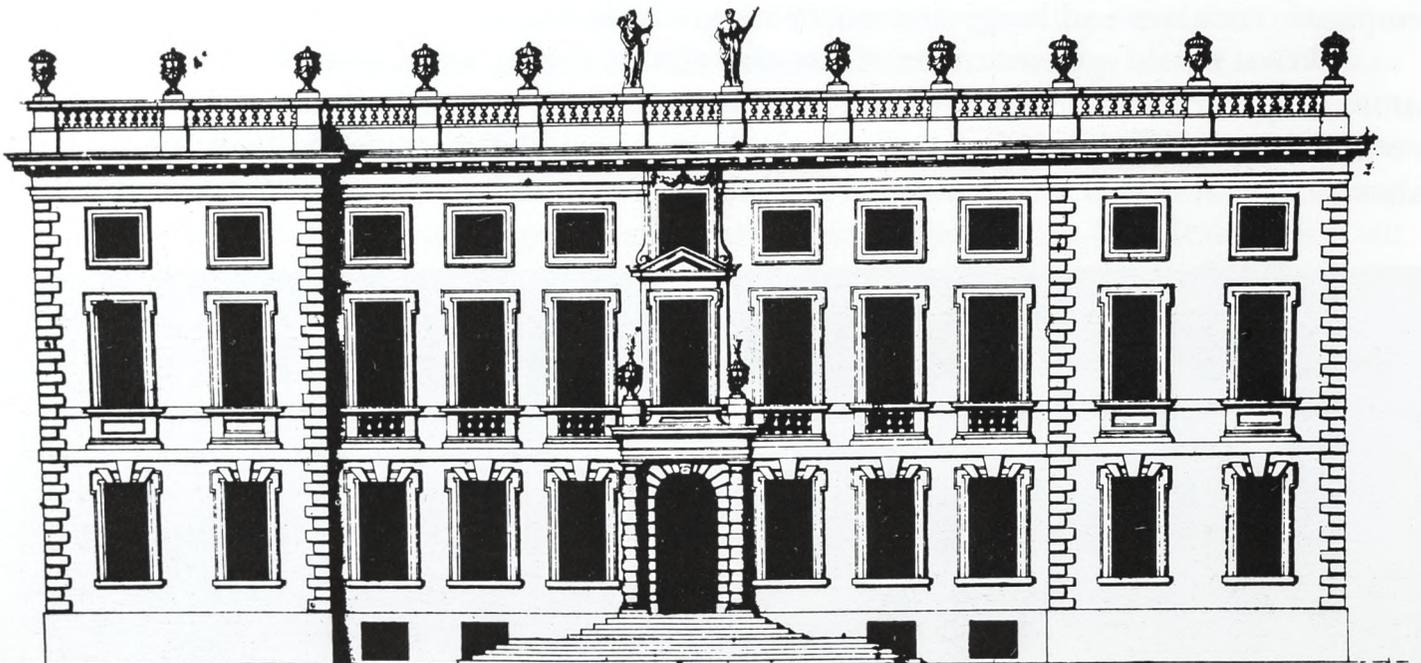


Fig. 7. William Talman, design for remodelling Raynham Hall, Norfolk, c1703 (Norfolk Record Office).

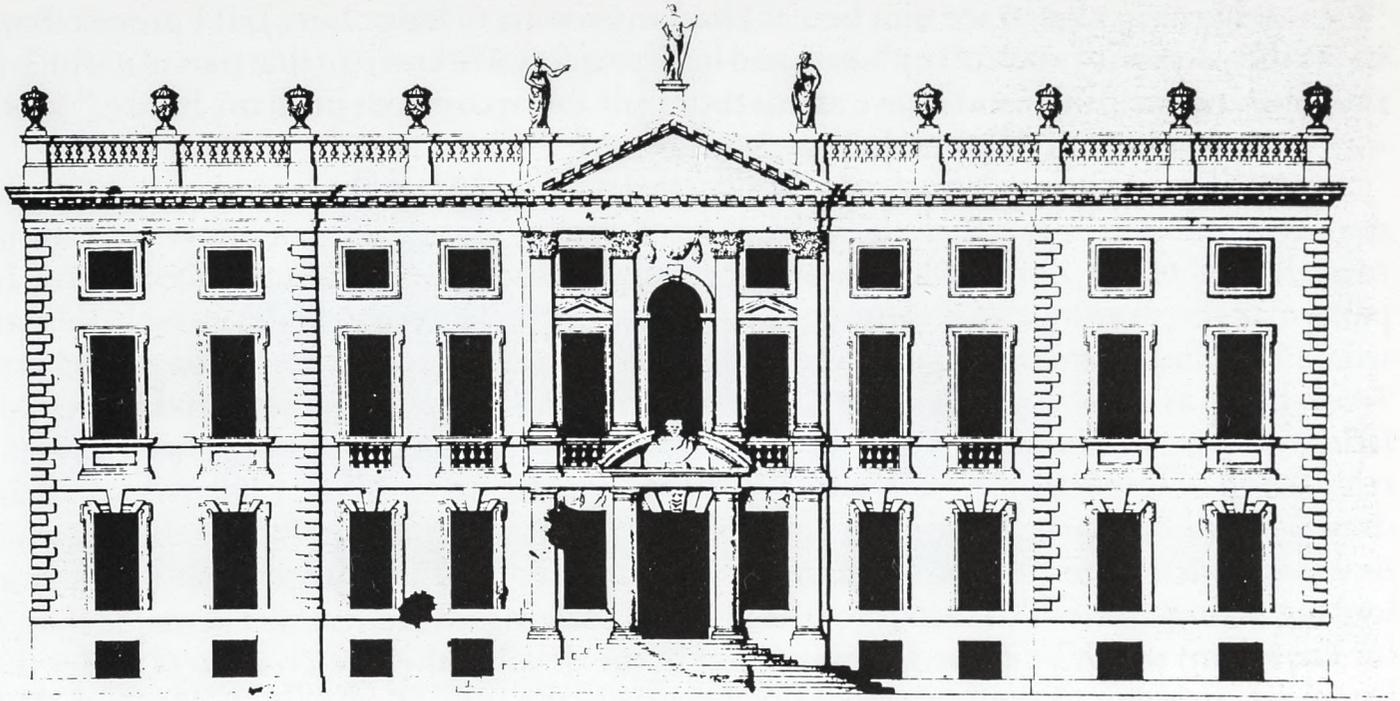


Fig. 9. 1671 survey drawing of Raynham Hall, Norfolk (British Architectural Library).

Shortly after beginning work at Dyrham, Talman had the chance to try his hand on a building which he probably thought was by Jones, Raynham Hall in Norfolk. Evidence for this comes from two hitherto-unpublished drawings in Talman's hand in Norfolk Central Library, discovered (although not identified) by John Harris and kindly passed on by him (Figs. 7 and 8).⁵ Raynham, which was closely based on Jones's buildings at Newmarket and in London, was built from 1622 to about 1637 by Sir Roger Townshend to his own designs.⁶ It was subsequently remodelled by William Kent between 1725 and 1732.⁷ But there was an intermediate period of works between 1671 when the house was surveyed (Fig. 9) and the early 1720s when it was drawn by Edmund Prideaux.⁸ Both east and west fronts were remodelled, and in particular the intermediate bays with their Serlian windows were replaced by more conventional windows modelled on those in the pavilions and the centrepiece was adapted to allow a front door (Fig. 4). These alterations can be dated to 1703 when Lord Townshend wrote concerning his brother's proposed visit to Raynham:

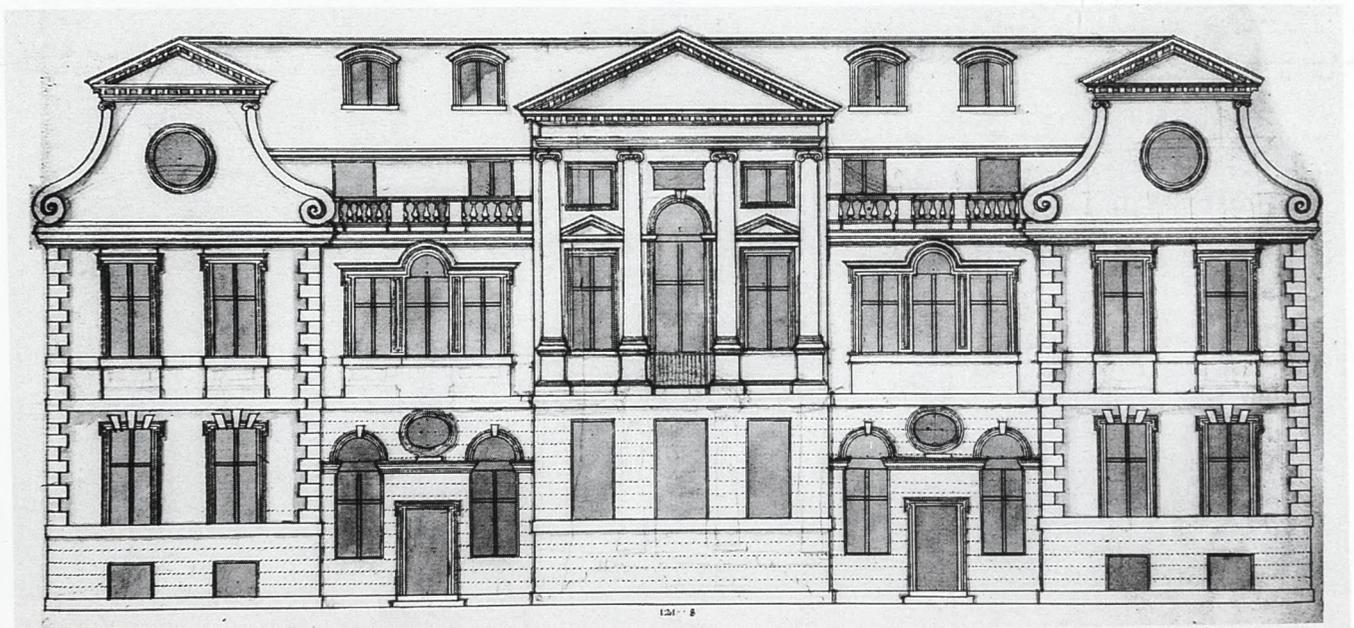


Fig. 8. William Talman, design for remodelling Raynham Hall, Norfolk, c1703 (Norfolk Record Office).

“I should be very glad to see him here if I had any rooms to lodge him, but I protest that I have taken down so much of my house and have so many workmen in that part of it which is standing and furnished and I have at this time only two spare beds in all my house.” Work was still incurring expense the following year.⁹

Close comparison between the house as it was in 1671, as it is now and the Talman drawings make it clear that these were preliminary designs for a more ambitious remodelling of the house which was subsequently carried out in a reduced form. In particular the drawings suggest the replacement of the Holborn gables, which Talman would have found uncomfortable, with a further half storey and balustrade, as at Dyrham. Townshend, as a leading Whig, would have been a logical patron for Talman and indeed his father-in-law’s brother, the Duke of Newcastle, employed Talman to draw up plans for remodelling Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire, in the same year, 1703. The Talman drawings show a marked sensitivity to the original building: presumably he thought that he was enhancing the “Jonesian” character of the house. They also suggest that Talman was looking at Inigo Jones’s drawings for the Prince’s Lodgings at Newmarket (a major source for Raynham) which he owned, in particular in the detail of the open balusters under the first-floor windows of the centrepiece and possibly the idea of an extra half storey. The remodelling of Raynham, even in its reduced form, should be added to the list of Talman attributions, and the question must be addressed as to how much of the interior of the house is Talman rather than Kent.

There can be no doubt of Talman’s interest in Jones given his purchase of a large number of Jones’s drawings. Talman also bought the Palladio drawings which Jones owned and indeed tried to buy Ashburnham House which he believed to be by Jones.¹⁰ Given this, it is not surprising to find numerous quotations from Palladio in Talman’s work, although most of the evidence comes from designs rather than executed work.

Talman’s most extensive series of designs for a villa was that for a Trianon for William III at Thames Ditton of about 1699 (Fig. 10). An early design has a central square hall opening at each end into a portico-in-antis, a plan found in Palladio’s Villa Thiene.¹¹ John Harris has also suggested that the entrance front may be based on one of the Palladio’s drawings he owned, particularly in the loggia columniation.¹² Above all, the basic idea of a villa with a rustic, piano nobile and central portico-in-antis is clearly Palladian in inspiration.

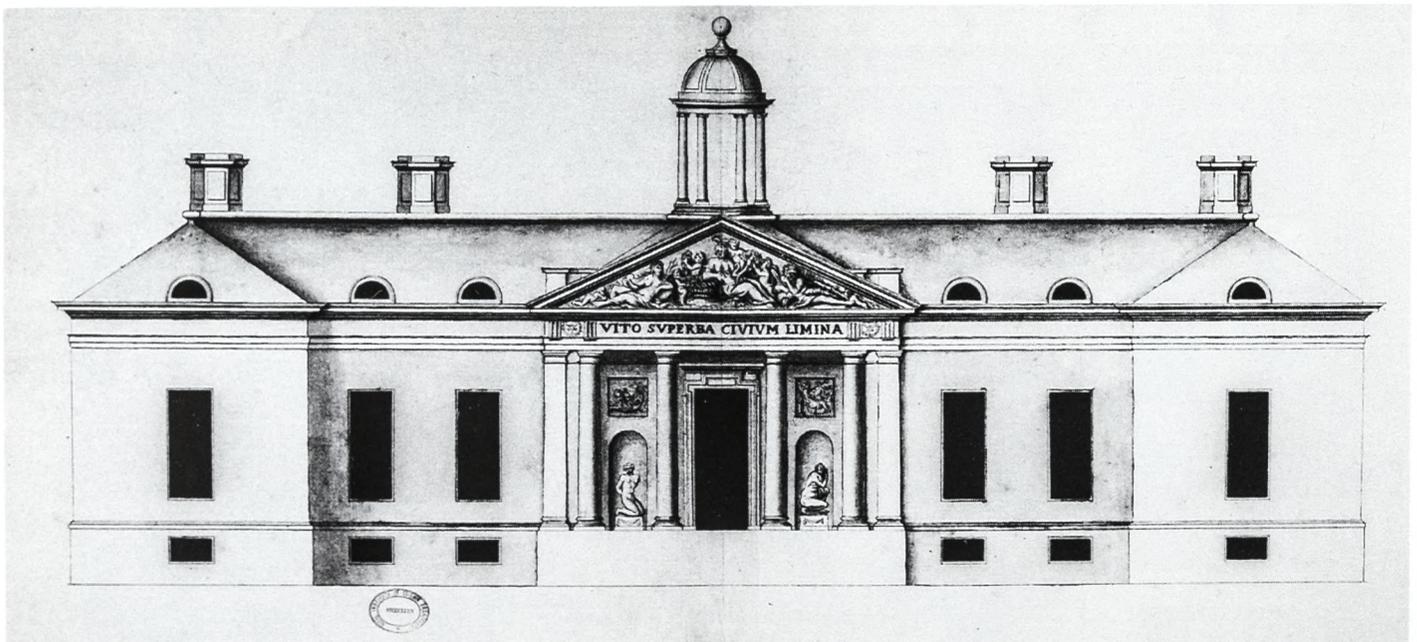


Fig. 10. William Talman, design for a villa for William III at Thames Ditton, c1699 (British Architectural Library).

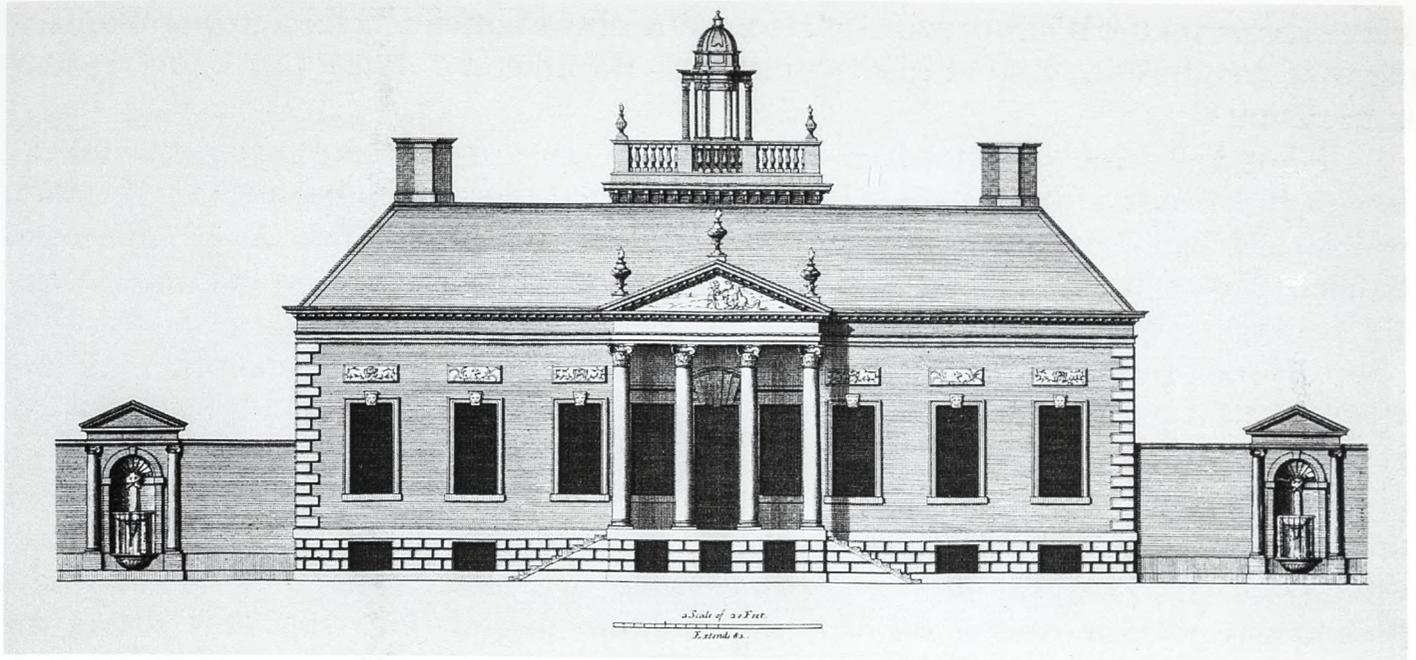


Fig. 11. William Benson, Wilbury House, Wiltshire, 1710, from *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715).

The Thames Ditton Trianon was never built, but less than a decade later a similar single-storey villa with a low rustic, hipped roof, cupola and tetrastyle portico was built in Wiltshire, Wilbury House (Fig. 11). This was erected by William Benson to his own designs, according to Colen Campbell. The house, traditionally seen as a key forerunner of the Palladian revival of the second decade of the 18th century, has always been something of a mystery as Benson showed no other signs of architectural ability. The debt to nearby Amesbury Abbey is clear, but it is hard to find a precedent for the basic format of the villa except in Talman's scheme. Could Benson have known it? Could Talman have been an

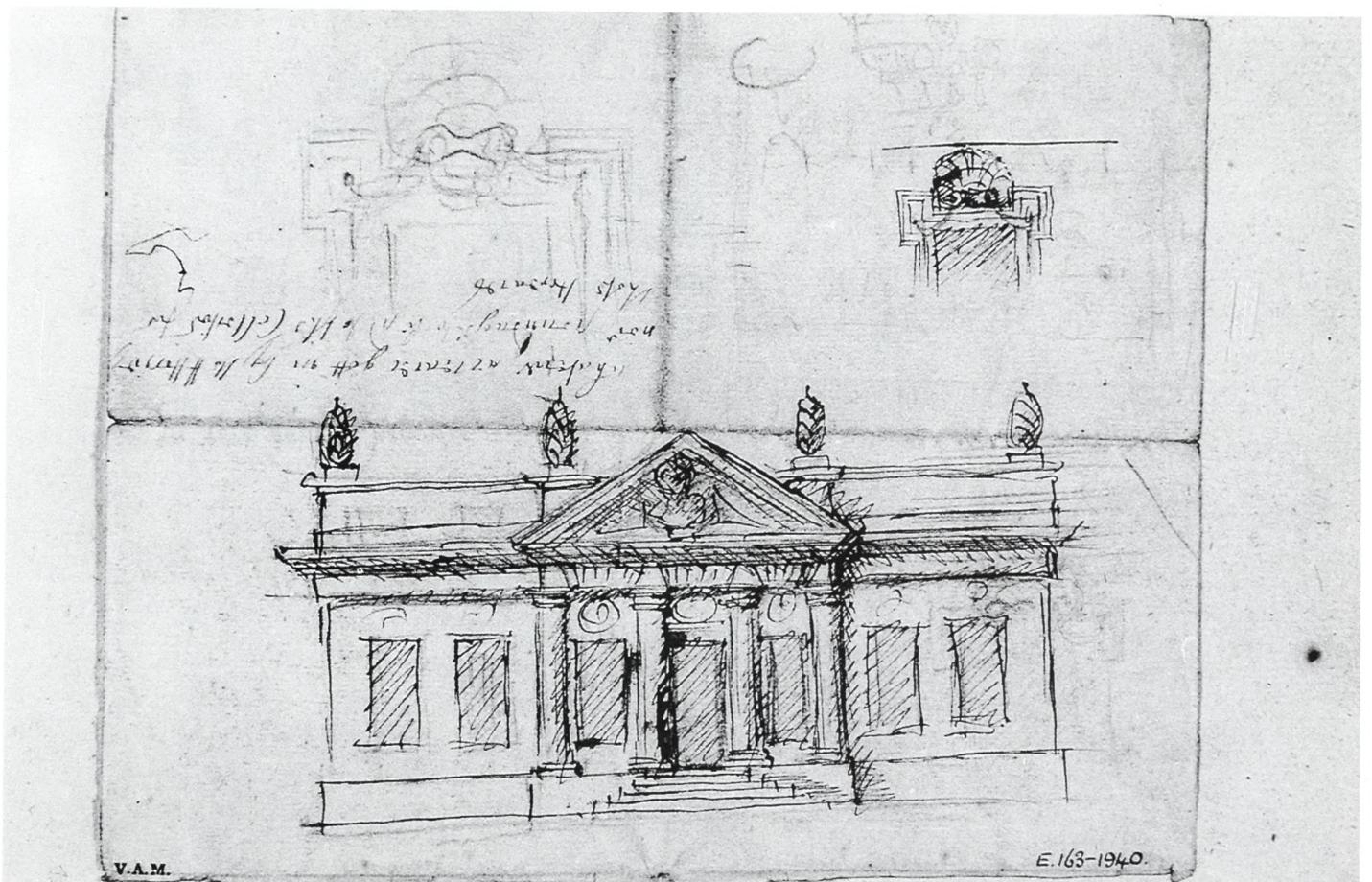


Fig. 12. William Talman, design for a villa (Victoria and Albert Museum).

early adviser on the Wilbury project? He was the obvious architect for a strong Whig like Benson to consult. But in the absence of documented links this must remain speculation.

Talman's interest in Palladian-style villas is clearly shown in some of the drawings by him in the Victoria and Albert Museum. One of these shows a single-storey seven-bay villa with an attached Doric portico (Fig. 12). Another sheet reveals a confused mass of designs based on Palladian tripartite villas with central porticos including the Villa Rotunda (Fig. 13).¹³ Some of these show distinct echoes of Wilbury.

Talman's interest in Palladio was not restricted to the villas. On a rather grander scale was the unexecuted scheme he produced in about 1703 for the Duke of Newcastle at Haughton, Nottinghamshire, now in Sir John Soane's Museum (Fig. 14).¹⁴ This has a pilastered ground floor supporting a heavy cornice, with a second pilastered order rising through one and a half stories. Palladio's Palazzo Chiericati was probably the source, not the executed version with its colonnaded loggias illustrated in the *Quattro Libri* but a preliminary version among the drawings Talman owned (Fig. 15). This shows the

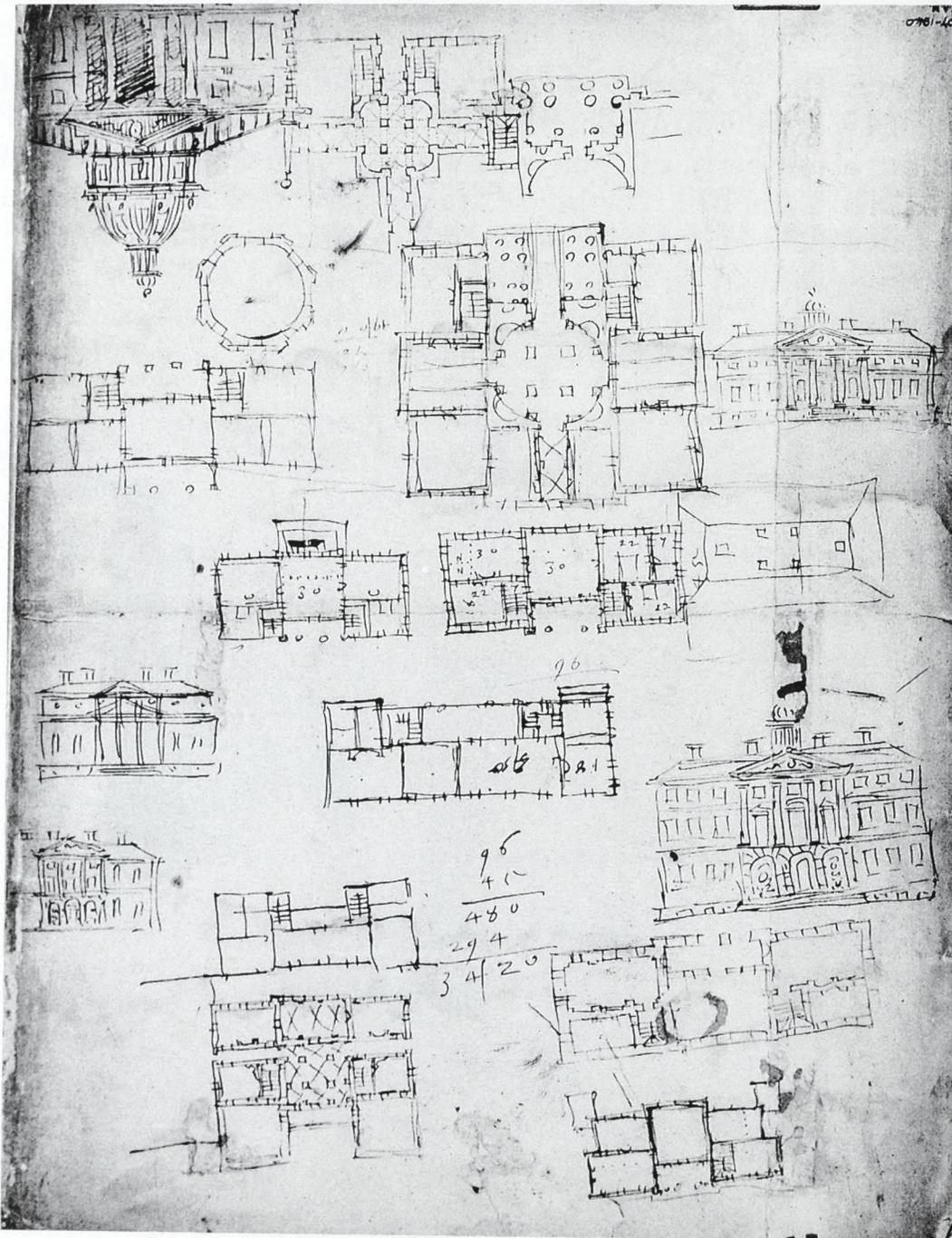


Fig. 13. William Talman, sheet of drawings in the Palladian manner (Victoria and Albert Museum).

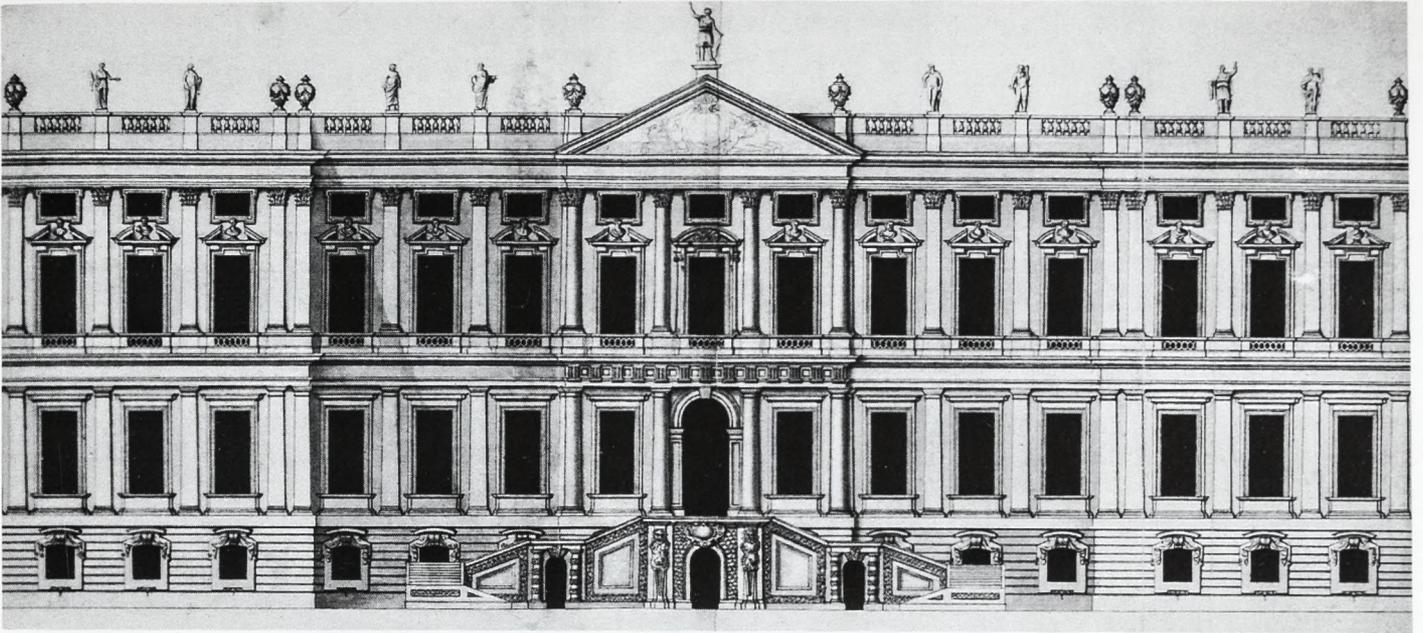


Fig. 14. William Talman, design for Haughton, Nottinghamshire, 1703 (Sir John Soane's Museum).

colonnade replaced by a pilastered wall and the addition of a central pediment and a round-headed front door. In the Haughton design Talman has added a basement, reduced the pediment to three bays, replaced the Ionic order with Corinthian, altered the proportions so that there is less space above the windows and broken the alternatively segmental and triangular pediments over the first-floor windows, but the model remains clear. The Haughton plan is also probably the first English example of a house with a main block and four pavilions, a layout which derives from Palladio's Villa Mocenigo and was to be popular later in the century. Contemporary with the Haughton design is Talman's scheme for adding a screen to Witham Park, Somerset (Fig. 16), which uses a columned

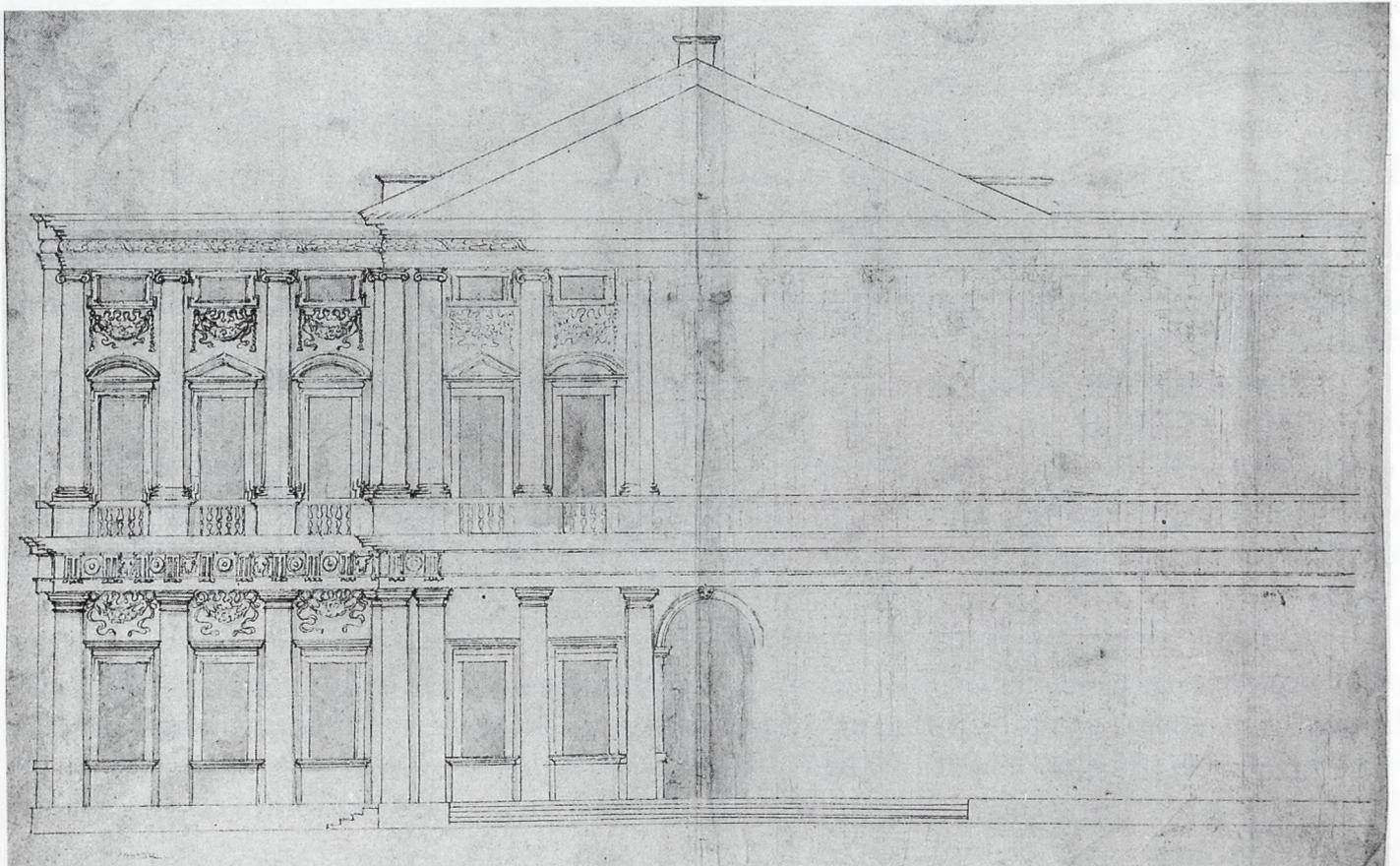


Fig. 15. Andrea Palladio, preliminary design for the Palazzo Chiericati (British Architectural Library).

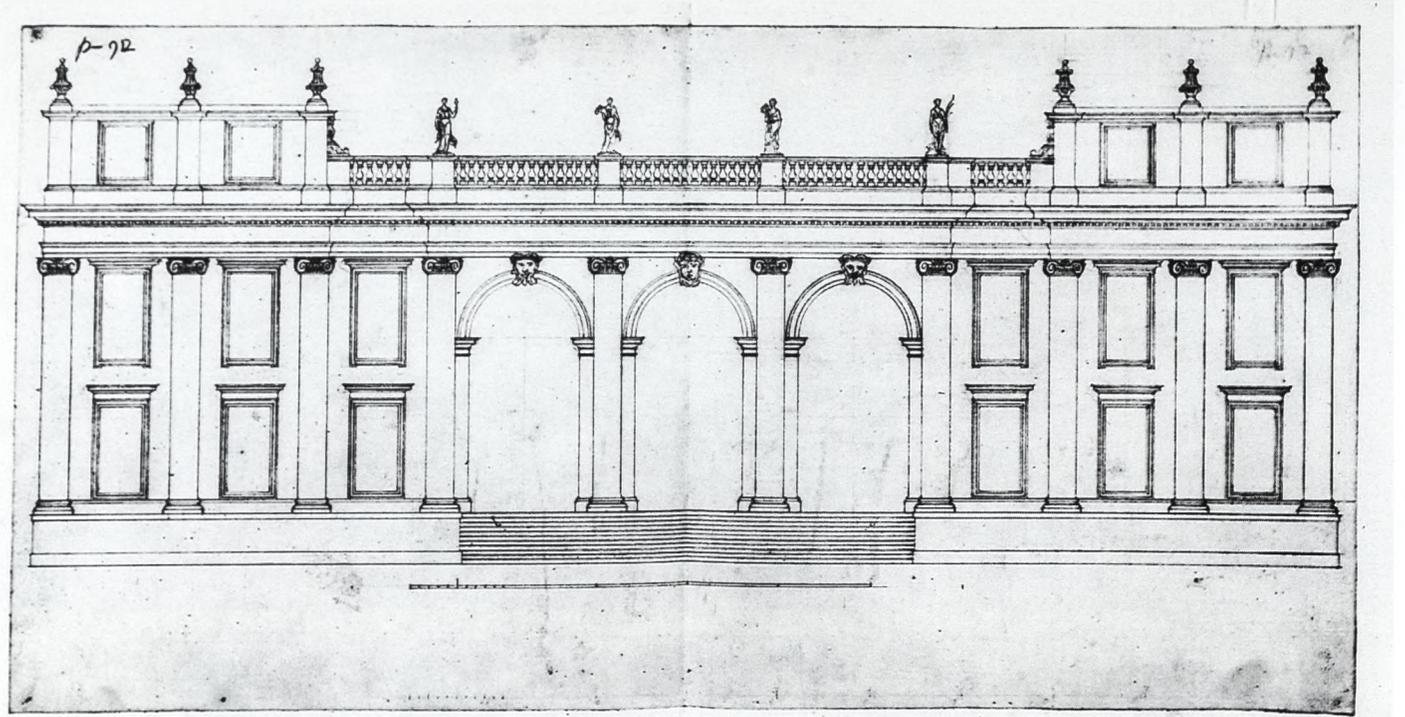


Fig. 16. William Talman, design for Witham Park, Somerset, c1702 (Victoria and Albert Museum).

arcade probably derived from the upper floor of the courtyard of the Palazzo Thiene (Fig. 17).

The design for Haughton shows how Talman quarried his Palladio drawings for ideas, and the same source can be seen behind the design at All Souls for the Parliament block elevation for the Palace of Whitehall planned after the fire of 1698.¹⁵ This has three features which suggest the influence of Palladio: rusticated arcading on the ground floor — an adapted version of the rustication on the Palazzo Iseppo Porto; the central Serlian window and the three Diocletian windows, which light a great Roman-bath-like central hall, under a triple broken-based pediment. This last, highly unusual, feature must derive from one of Palladio's drawings now in the RIBA.¹⁶ Authorship of the parliament design is disputed and an alternative attribution could be made to Hawksmoor who must also have known the drawing, as one of his All Souls drawings of 1708-09 has a sketch on the back for a triple-broken based pediment. Whoever was responsible — and it is stylistically unlikely to have been Wren — the design could only have been made by an architect who knew Palladio's drawing.

The influence of Palladio can be seen in Waldershare Park, Kent, built between 1705 and 1712, which is attributed by John Harris to Talman. Waldershare's five-bay centrepiece with one and a half stories under a heavy cornice framed by attached columns is a most unusual design, hard to parallel in English architecture. The source is almost certainly the lower half of the centrepiece of Palladio's design for the Palazzo Antonini in Udine.

Talman cannot be explained solely by reference to Palladio and Inigo Jones. Other influences are important. In his planning his predilection for oval entrance halls with dramatic staircases opening off them Talman probably looks to France — although the influence of Hugh May's oval hall at Cassiobury Park, Hertfordshire, of about 1677-80 should not be overlooked.¹⁷ France is certainly the source for the unusual design for Panton Hall, Lincolnshire, with its central oval saloon and projecting canted bay. In some of his detail Talman followed the fashions of the first two decades of the 18th century: in his use of French-style quoining and channelled rustication at Dyrham and in some of his

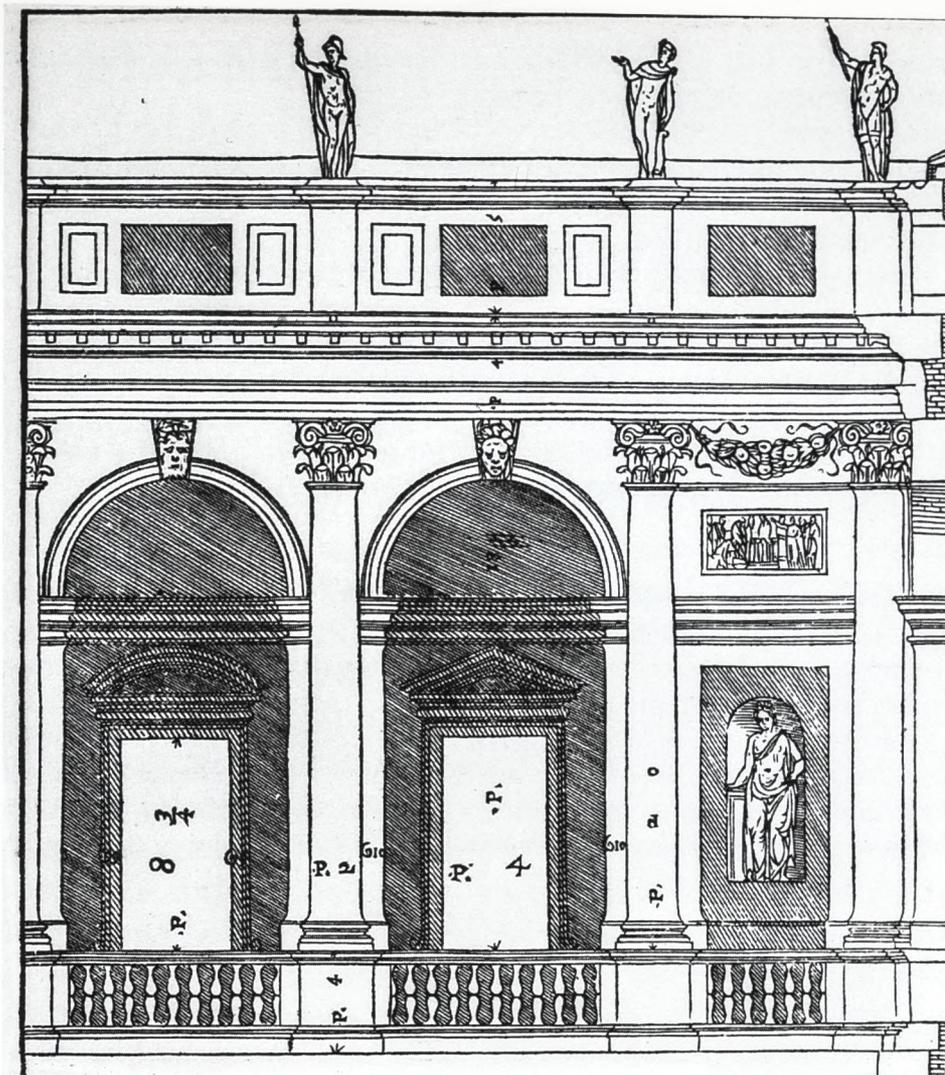


Fig. 17. Andrea Palladio, detail of the courtyard of the Palazzo Thiene from *I Quattro Libri* (1570).

unexecuted designs, and in his use of windows with lugged architraves, an Italian feature more commonly associated with Thomas Archer. But in his executed work Talman was perhaps less maverick than has been suggested, with Palladio, buildings associated with Inigo Jones, and the Pratt manner all playing a major part in his designs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank John Harris both for reading and commenting on a draft of this article and for providing many of the illustrations, including the two hitherto unpublished.

NOTES

1. John Harris, *William Talman: Maverick Architect*, 1982, 14.
2. Frances Harris, "Holywell House, St Albans: an early work by William Talman?", *Architectural History* 28, 1985, 32-36. Nottingham University Library, Portland London Collection, Box 41: particulars of the charges in making bricks at Bullstrode given by Mr Tallman, February 9, 1715 (information from Mr John Harris).
3. It has also been suggested that it is improbable that Talman, who is generally seen as a Whig architect, would have worked both for Lord Lumley and Lord Grey. The former was a prominent Tory and supporter of James II who commanded the troop of cavalry which captured the Duke of Monmouth after the Battle of Sedgmoor. The latter was a Whig who fought on Monmouth's side at the battle. However, the Duke of Marlborough (then Lord Churchill) — whose house by Talman was also designing in 1686 — was second-in-command of the King's army at Sedgmoor. Before 1688 Talman does not seem to have had any qualms about working for Tories, although subsequently, like Churchill and Grey, his political loyalties would seem to have moved with the change of regime.

- There is thus no reason why he should not have worked for a Tory in 1686 and a Whig in 1690.
4. Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus* I, London, 1715, 6.
 5. Norfolk Central Library, Norfolk and Norwich Record Office, Rye MS 17/vi.
 6. Linda Campbell, "Documentary Evidence for the building of Raynham Hall", *Architectural History* 32, 1989, 52-57.
 7. Michael Wilson, *William Kent*, 1984, 102.
 8. John Harris, "The Prideaux Collection of Topographical Drawings", *Architectural History* 7, 1964, figs 87-89.
 9. Susanna Wade Martins, "Turnip" Townshend, North Walsham, 1990, 32-33.
 10. Bodleian Library MS Eng Letters p 34, ff 25, 99, 179, 331.
 11. *Ibid.* fig 51.
 12. John Harris, "Trianon Designs of William and John Talman", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XXIII, 1960, 143; RIBA Palladio drawings Vol XVII, 21.
 13. *Ibid.* fig 48.
 14. *Ibid.* fig 69.
 15. Kerry Downes, *English Baroque Architecture*, 1966, fig 16, pl 78.
 16. RIBA Drawings Collection, Palladio drawings Vol XVII, 15.
 17. The link between May and Talman is one that would repay study. Margaret Whinney suggested such a connection in her pioneering study "William Talman", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XVIII, 1955, 123-24. There are possible stylistic links between Talman's early work and that of May, and John Harris has suggested that Talman's characteristic use of pairs of spiral staircases may derive from May's work at Berkeley House in Picadilly if, as seems likely, the plan of the central part of Kent's Devonshire House (illustrated in *Vitruvius Britannicus* IV, 20) repeats the floor plan of the earlier house.