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THE LLOYDS BANK FACADE AT TROWBRIDGE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH WILLIAM TALMAN'S FACADE AT DYRHAM PARK

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The early years of William Talman's career have been rightly described as an enigma. The relationship of Talman's east front of Dyrham Park with that of a wealthy clothier's early 18th-century town house in Trowbridge, Wiltshire, is another.

The 18th-century town houses of Trowbridge were praised by Pevsner as: "palazzi", "amazingly stately", "would make quite notable additions to the palazzo architecture of . . . Verona".¹ One he singles out as "so grand as to call to mind Genoa.". This is the house occupied since 1866 by Lloyds Bank and its predecessors. Like its neighbours it is well maintained and it was restored by the bank about 25 years ago, with its decorative stone carving faithfully reproduced, as can be judged by photographs taken about 100 years ago.

Its design stands out among the Artisan Mannerism of the houses in the nearby Parade by the sophistication and consistency of its scheme and its ornament (Fig. 1). It is virtually identical to the seven central bays of the east front of Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire, some 20



Fig. 1. The facade of the Trowbridge branch of Lloyds Bank.

miles to the north, which was begun in 1700 to a design supplied by Talman in 1695 (Fig. 2). But, except for a passing reference to a possible influence of Dyrham Park on the Trowbridge design in a periodical article, the parallels between the two facades seems not to have been given detailed consideration in any published writing.

There is virtual identity, going beyond mere similarity, in both the basic scheme and the details. But the Trowbridge facade carries out the Dyrham scheme in a more determined and logical way even than the Dyrham design as published in the 1717 volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus*. The Trowbridge builders also put the blind balustrading correctly, which those at Dyrham did not.

The basis of the Dyrham design is that used by Peter Mills at Thorpe Hall, Peterborough, in 1653,² in which the seven first-floor windows have an alternate presence and absence of pediments, an alternation of triangular and segmental pediments, and vertical linkage of windows by projecting “aprons”.

At Dyrham Park the central pediment is triangular and those either side are segmental. The windows with pediments have blind balustrading below and those without pediments do not. The attic windows above those without pediments are distinguished by foliage panels linking them with the windows below. All the ground floor windows have console brackets above them, which appear as supports for a platband. At Dyrham it is only in the three outer bays at either end of the 13-bay front that the brackets below the pedimented windows are deeper and of a different design from the others.



Fig. 1. The central seven bays of the east front of Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire.

Compared with the seven central bays of the Dyrham front, the Trowbridge front carries this alternation of brackets along the whole of its seven bays: short brackets with a sunflower motif below the unpedimented windows, deeper brackets with different ornament below the pedimented windows. Similar but differently ornamented brackets support the pediments. The attic windows have eared architraves above the pediments and plain architraves above those without pediments; and the projecting aprons below the pedimented windows are carried through into the basement storey.

There are small differences: at Trowbridge the first-floor windows are slightly shorter in relation to those above and below them, and the attic windows are noticeably taller; the central windows above the door are only three panes wide (four panes wide at Dyrham), giving the central pediment the same width as the others; the decoration of the central window is omitted; and the crowning balustrade at Trowbridge is divided illogically into five sections as against the seven sections at Dyrham.

To whom can the Trowbridge design be attributed? Unfortunately, there is no documentation, even of the exact date of its construction. K. H. Rogers, who has researched the origins of the Trowbridge houses and their occupants,³ tells us that Thomas Cooper, a prosperous clothier, bought one house in Fore Street, Trowbridge, in 1675 and the house next door to it in 1691. So at any time after 1691 he could have embarked on the building of a new frontispiece to these two older houses. Alternatively, this could be the work of his youngest son John who succeeded him in 1724. The new building is only one room deep and the older houses were still visible behind it until their almost total reconstruction by the bank about 15 years ago.

So far, no connection of any kind between Cooper and Talman has been discovered, but there are tantalizing lines of speculation. The search for one led to the parish registers of West Lavington (about ten miles from Trowbridge) and Steeple Ashton (five miles from Trowbridge). Talmans can be traced back to the 13th century in taxation and other records in the tithing of Hinton (now known as Great Hinton) in the parish of Steeple Ashton and, in the later 16th century, at Paxcroft, a very small settlement only two miles from Trowbridge. William Talman may have been born at West Lavington as some authorities have said,⁴ but he was baptised at St Margaret's Westminster, on December 1, 1650. His parents, William and Sybilla, were married there in 1649. This William was almost certainly the William Talman baptised at West Lavington in 1619, the fifth child and fourth son of a William Talman who died in 1653. The latter's baptism and marriage do not appear in the West Lavington parish registers, nor can they be found among the many Talman entries in the registers at Steeple Ashton.

Another Talman link with Trowbridge comes through his patron Henry Hyde, 2nd Earl of Clarendon. Henry's father, the 1st Earl, was the son of Mary Langford, member of a wealthy Trowbridge clothing family. Through her, the Hydes became owners of property in Trowbridge. A subsidiary manor known as "Trowbridge Dauntsey", whose principal house stood on a site adjacent to Cooper's house, was acquired in 1711 by the Pierreponts, Dukes of Kingston and Earls Manvers, of Thoresby Hall, another of Talman's early commissions.

A possible connection between Talman and Cooper's house must remain an enigma and it would seem more probable that Cooper had seen Dyrham's east front during or soon after its construction, or even, more likely, that he may have seen the engraving in the 1717 *Vitruvius Britannicus* and instructed a local mason to copy it. Whatever the truth, it is remarkable that Cooper was able to find an architect/mason who could take all the elements of the Dyrham design and reduce them to a seven-bay front while using them in a more logical and consistent way.

The Dyrham and Trowbridge fronts seem both to have had their own influence on

builders in their neighbourhoods. The vertical linking of windows by projecting aprons is a feature of minor early Georgian house fronts in Bath and Marshfield and in Trowbridge – though not, curiously, in Bradford on Avon. There, however, the Lloyds Bank facade's use of brackets seems to have led local masons to misapply such brackets in a way which makes the architraves of windows look as if they are hanging from a picture rail on old-fashioned S-shaped hooks. Finally, a note on such interior decoration as has survived in the Lloyds Bank house. In successive extensions of the ground floor banking hall, later, Adamesque ceiling panels and frieze of what must have been an entrance hall have been carefully copied. On the first floor there survives original plasterwork in the style of Edward Goudge, decorating what must have been the ceiling of a staircase leading to a saloon .

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NOTES

1. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Buildings of England, Wiltshire*, 1963.
2. Giles Worsley, "William Talman: some stylistic suggestions", *Georgian Group Journal* 1992, 8–10.
3. K. H. Rogers, "Trowbridge Clothiers and their Houses", in *Textile History and Economic History: Essays in honour of Miss Julia de Lacy Mann*, Manchester, 1973.
4. M. D. Whinney, "William Talman", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XVIII, 1955; *Wren Society*, XVII, 1.