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TOWERS AND STAIRCASES: THE TRANSFORMATION OF DRAYTON HOUSE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF WILLIAM TALMAN

1702–1704

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References to William Talman's contribution to Drayton House in Northamptonshire usually refer solely to the courtyard façade. Fortunately the contract for Talman's work survives and it becomes clear when one analyses it that he designed a great deal more than just the courtyard façade. It is the aim of this article to demonstrate that in fact he undertook a major revision of the main block of the

house as it existed when the contract was signed in 1702.¹ The contract is between the owner of Drayton, Sir John Germaine, and the master mason, Benjamin Jackson, but it refers to work being done according to drawings and plans 'by Mr Talman'. The full contract was published by Geoffrey Webb in 1953,² but is republished here in an Appendix.



Fig. 1. Drayton House, the complete west front. From left to right: The 1580s wing and tower behind; the two bay medieval solar/undercroft; the Stone Staircase tower; 1580s infill; centre the battlements of the medieval porch; 1580s infill; Oak Staircase tower; two bays c.1700; far right the new c.1700 tower. (*Author*)

Before discussing Talman's work at Drayton it is useful to try and establish the form of the house prior to 1702. Drayton House (Fig. 1) was originally built in around 1300 by Simon de Drayton. It was a large double courtyard house, moated, and the core of that house is still evident today, i.e. the great hall, great chamber and undercroft and portions of walls or known foundations. The entrance at this time was from the west, with a forecourt with a porch into the Hall and a rear walled courtyard. There were more alterations towards the end of the fifteenth century by Sir Henry Greene, when it seems that the Hall was overhauled and given new windows and a large bay was added at the dais end (Fig. 2). Portions of Perpendicular traceried panelling and sections of heavy curved mouldings found some years ago on clearing a shrubbery suggest a Hall bay very similar to that still surviving at Fawsley Hall (Northamptonshire), where the sides and soffit of the bay arch have just such traceried panels. The medieval porch was also given a hexagonal battlemented top (Fig. 3). It is worth noting that in Halstead's *Succinct Genealogies*, published in 1685, where Halstead is thought to be a synonym for Henry,

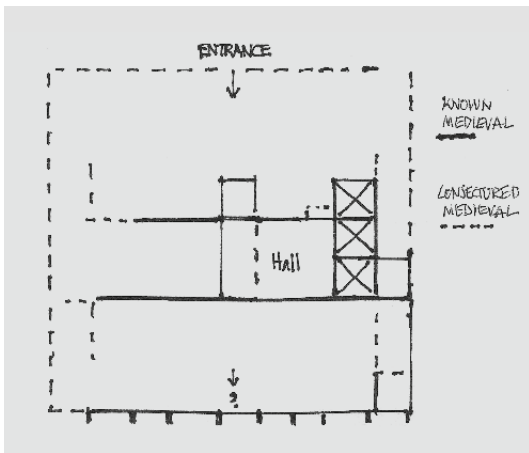


Fig. 2. The medieval house layout (Diagrammatic: not to scale). The house is built across the compass directions, but for the purpose of this article north is to the right of each plan.

second Earl of Peterborough, there is an engraved plate showing coats of arms in various windows at Drayton, including nine shields 'in the lesser window' in the Hall and three 'in the greater window.'³ The top of a large Perpendicular-traceried window also survives at roof level in the rear wall of the Hall, its high position, above the roof eaves, suggesting that the hall windows had separate gables, as at Stokesay Castle (Shropshire), dating from the 1280s.

By the sixteenth century the estate had passed to the Mordaunt family, originally from Turvey (Bedfordshire). The third Lord Mordaunt added a tall three-storeyed wing on the north side of the house in the 1580s, containing state rooms with a long gallery on its top floor, accessed from a tower fitted with a grand oak staircase.⁴ At the same period the west front was extended by having rooms built alongside the medieval porch, probably producing a more or less flat façade. The fifth Lord Mordaunt was created Earl of Peterborough in 1627, and his son Henry, the second Earl, called in John Webb in 1652 to remodel the house. He had Webb create a new entrance forecourt on the east side of the house, incorporating a castellated gateway, stables and other ancillary buildings, but it seems that he left the main block of the house as it was in the sixteenth century (Fig. 4).⁵ This then is the house which faced Talman in 1702.

We now come to an intriguing incident which almost certainly influenced the final work done by Talman. In 1697, the second Earl of Peterborough, died, leaving Drayton to his daughter Mary. She had been married to Henry, seventh Duke of Norfolk, but the marriage had failed due to an affair she had with Sir John Germaine, a Dutchman in the train of William of Orange, and she and the Duke lived apart from 1685. Described as 'a soldier of fortune', Germaine had some close affinity with William, and may have been his half-brother. As the affair continued the Duke endeavoured in 1692 to persuade Parliament to grant him a divorce. Being a Catholic and a peer of the realm, he needed



Fig. 3. The centre of the west front. The former medieval porch is at the centre, with Talman's doorcase and the two staircase towers left and right. The ground floor windows were rectangular sash windows of c.1700 until their replacement in around 1900. (Author)

Parliament's approval, which was initially difficult to procure. This resulted in a number of court cases which became one of the entertainments of London. Even the King attended in disguise. All the sympathy was with the Duchess, the Duke's own behaviour, having flaunted his mistress at Court, being already a talking point in the city. Parliament eventually granted Norfolk a divorce in April 1700, but the poor man lived only another year to enjoy his freedom, and he never remarried. To give Mary and Germaine some credit, they did not marry until after the Duke's death in 1701⁶.

Shortly after her father's death in 1697, Mary, the Duchess, approached the architect William Winde to advise on completing some building work in the forecourt of the house which had been left unfinished. Winde records the event in a letter

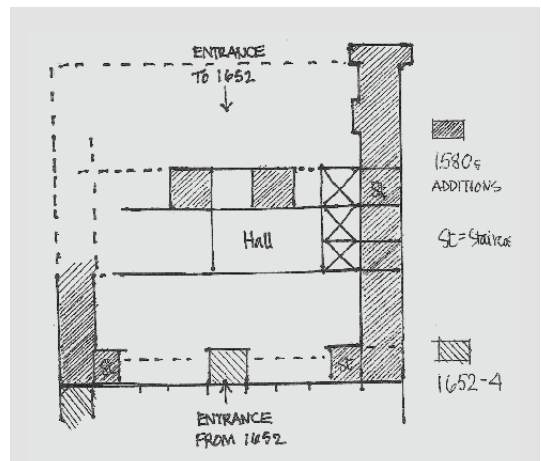


Fig. 4. The layout before Talman's alterations. (Diagrammatic: not to scale).



Fig. 5. The east front c.1700. One of two paintings showing the pre-1700 roof above the hall (right) and kitchen/servery (left) with their wooden cupolas, and also showing the idea of the symmetrical tower complexes (*Artist unknown*).

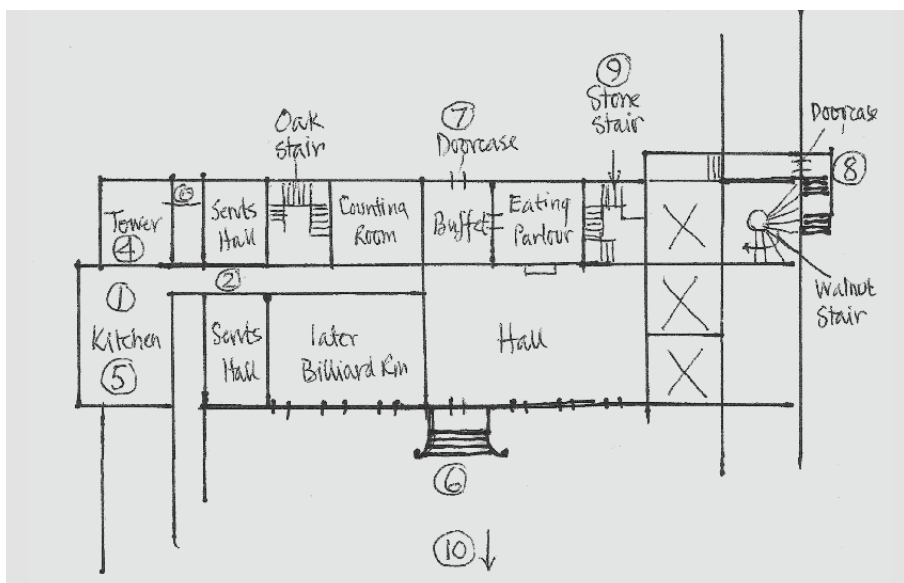


Fig. 6. The layout of the central (Hall) block after Talman's alterations, showing the position of the items mentioned in the 1702 contract (redrawn from plan in Heward and Taylor, *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire*, p. 176).

of December 1697 to Lady Bridgeman of Castle Bromwich Hall (Warwickshire), where he was working: ‘for ye spring (God permitting) I am ingage to waite on the Duchess of Norfolk To Drayden, in Northehampton shier⁷. There is unfortunately no record of what was discussed between Winde and the Duchess, but there are two views of the house at Drayton painted in oil in around 1700. They show the house before Talman began work, and are taken from the east with the new forecourt, one showing it fronted by gate-piers and an ironwork screen, the other having a stone wall and gate-piers (Fig. 5). They show the early form of the house with two wooden louvre cupolas, one above the Hall and the other over the servery or Kitchen. But they also show two sets of towers: the 1580s tower on the right and a balancing set of matching towers on the left. Now it is clear, as will be seen shortly, that the second tower was part of Talman’s building programme. Is it possible, therefore, that it was Winde who suggested duplicating the towers to give the house a symmetrical effect, and that these two paintings were commissioned to show the result?

This brings us to the Talman contract. The precise references to building are as follows:

‘to build certain Roomes at Drayton, as a Kitching and offices to it ... and the two Servants Halls and other rooms with a staircase as it is drawn described and set down in the ground plat by Mr Talman and the upright of ye said building to be performed according to the Draft made also by Mr Talman. And to build a strong Tower with Cupolow answerable to the Design thereof drawn, and the ruff stone work of ye buildings to be in goodnesse answerable and agreeable to the goodnesse of the tower now standing at Drayton?’

‘to build another cupolow for the Tower which is now standing at Drayton?’

‘and to make a pair of circular stayres of stone for ye said Tower from the bottom to the top thereof

‘to turn arches of freestone for ye Kitching Chimney?’

‘to turn a vault under ye Tower to secure the spring of water wch serves ye House?’

‘to finish ye front of ye house against ye comeing into Drayton Hall wth heads, vases and flowers or pineapples upon pedestals in all points according to ye draft or designe drawne by Mr Talman’

‘to pull down all ye old Building walls where he is to make ye new building?’

‘to build a new Dore case for ye lobby Dore yt goes out into ye garden according to ye Draft thereof drawn?’

‘and to new lay and alter ye Stayre case going from ye dore down into ye garden and to make a half space in ye middle of those stayres?’

‘And also to make an Oval stayrecase of the best white Ketton stone to Go down out of the Grande Hall to lead up to ye dining Room doore of ye best white Ketton stone to be layd and fixed into the wall to be made hanging stayres strong and well wrought?’

‘to dress over and make good what is wanting in two pare of pears and set them up one pare at ye end of Pell-Mell and ye other against ye horse close.’

The contract states that the work is to be finished by ‘the latter end of May or the middle of June next’ at a cost of £825. On the reverse of the contract are recorded a series of payments beginning on 24 November 1702 and running through to April 1704, most of which are made to John Woodall ‘for ye use of my Master Mr Jackson.’ There is also a receipt dated 20 March 1702 by Benjamin Jackson for £50 ‘for and towards the building at Drayton.’ This has a further interest since it is witnessed by Huntington Shaw, the wrought ironsmith, who by that time was foreman to the famous Jean Tijou. The total receipts amount to £962, 14s, 1d.

If now we simplify the above extracts, we can identify features which survive at Drayton, and it is then possible to plot these on an outline plan (Fig. 6) to show where they are located within the main block of the house:

1. Certain rooms with a Kitchen and a staircase: the new kitchen but also other rooms and a staircase in the lower southern tower.
2. Two servants’ halls.



Fig. 7. The ‘new’ 1702 tower and the kitchen with its pyramidal roof. (*Author*)

3. ‘Upright of ye said building’ – this must be a façade drawing, alas, no longer surviving.
4. A new tower copying the tower already standing, with its own circular stone staircase. (Fig. 7)
5. Kitchen fireplaces and a vault under the tower.
6. ‘Ye front of ye house’, i.e. the Courtyard façade.
7. A new doorcase from ‘the lobby into ye garden’: the hall ante-room, structurally the medieval entrance porch.
8. The staircase going down into the garden: the North front garden staircase (Fig. 8), and also a further oval set of steps in the garden.
9. Oval staircase from the Hall to the Dining Room: the Stone Stairs from the Hall up to the King’s Dining Room. (Fig. 9)
10. Gate-piers: ‘Pell-Mell’ refers to the gates of the east Gravel Court, and the Horse Close piers are those at the end of the east avenue. (Fig. 10)

By looking at the surviving accounts, and at the two earliest inventories at Drayton, of 1710 and 1724, we can add further colour to this outline plan. In May 1702 the carver William Woodman presented

Fig. 8. The north front with the Talman doorcase and garden steps, also showing to its left the base of the 1580s staircase tower and evidence of the pre-1700 window arrangement. (*Author*)





Fig. 9. The Stone Stairs with their wrought-iron handrail and Lanscroe's painted decoration of 1712. (*Author*)

Fig. 10. Drayton House, the 'Pell-Mell' forecourt gates and piers. Ironwork by the Tijou workshop. Eagles on the central piers for the Mordaunts, Earls of Peterborough, and hawks on the side piers for Germaine. (*Author*)



a bill 'for Marble Worke done for the Honble Sr John Germain.' It includes especially 'a Ritch Italian vein'd Marble Chimney peece in the Great Hall at Drayton by Agreement' costing £40. Talman's design for the façade of the Hall to the courtyard has three tall sash windows, so that wall would have to have been refitted internally; the present panelling and Ionic pilasters which surround the room and the fireplace made to fit that scheme⁸. The plaster barrel ceiling must also date from this time. Woodman also supplied marble tables and polished some marble cisterns, and these are part of a Buffet room created within the hall lobby, originally the medieval porch. This is usefully described in the 1710 Inventory: 'In the Beaufert Roome adjoining to the Great Hall, Four tables, A marble table for the beaufert, Two Marble neeches, Two Marble Cisterns with marble faced plints, The top of the Neeches and the Beaufert painted by Mr Lanscroe.'⁹ This refers to Gerard Lanscroe (c.1655-1737), who reappeared later with the decoration of the new stone staircase.¹⁰ The outside door of this room is indeed a Talman design (Fig. 8). It probably replaced an Elizabethan



Fig. 11. Drayton House, the courtyard façade; the hall on the right, the new reception room left. (*Author*)

doorway with Doric pilasters and frieze which was reset in the garden wall.

The structure of the Kitchen (No. 1 in Fig. 6) still survives with its arched fireplaces and takes the form of a large square building with a pyramidal roof which would originally been open to full height with a top louvre opening (Fig. 7). It was subdivided in 1795. The ‘certain Rooms’ with a staircase would seem to refer to those alongside the kitchen running along the west front. The 1710 Inventory makes a useful reference to ‘rooms in the passage at the top of the red Stairs Towards the front in the new Buildings.’ The ‘Upright’ is of course a façade drawing for this front, again, alas, no longer extant. The façade design (Fig. 5) is interesting in being relatively plain in effect but preserving the

earlier feature of battlemented parapets with two low towers designed to house staircases. The west front ends with ‘the new tower’, matching in profile exactly the 1580s tower and having a small spiral stone staircase from bottom to top as the contract directs (No. 4 in Fig. 6). There is no mention of this tower in the 1710 Inventory, but in that of 1724 we find: ‘In the first Roome in the new Tower’ and then a list of eight further rooms, although they were very sparsely fitted up. The conclusion has to be that the second tower was not finally built or at any rate completed until some time between 1710 and 1724. Interestingly, when a room at the top of this tower was being refurbished in 1992 a workman’s shoe was found under the floorboards, and this was dated by the Keeper of National Collection of Footwear at the

Northampton Museum to between 1700 and 1720, a useful tiny piece of corroborative evidence. The ‘Oval Stayre case’ (No. 8, in Fig. 6) is in fact situated in the other low tower, that near the Kitchen and new tower. It is indeed cantilevered (‘hanging’) and of Ketton stone, with a handrail of wrought iron, almost certainly the work of Huntington Shaw. The 1710 Inventory again usefully records a ‘Dressing roome over ye new Stone Stairs’ There is no stone doorcase at its head, but its walls were painted by Lanscroun in 1712.¹¹

This leaves us with the staircase down into the garden and the gate-piers (Nos. 8 and 10 in Fig. 6). The garden staircase is that on the north side of the house and is a double flight with a half landing, as the contract states. It also has wrought ironwork from the Huntington/Tijou workshop. The ‘Pell-Mell’ gate-piers are a splendid set (Fig. 10). They have eagles on the main piers for the Mordaunt Earls of Peterborough and hawks on the side piers for Germaine. One pier has the Duchess’s armorials and the other Germaine’s. Between them is more wrought iron work, the overthrow being especially fine and typical of the Tijou workshop. Those at the top of the east avenue fronting Horse Close are less elaborate but still worthy of Tijou.

The main feature of the Talman contract is the magnificent courtyard façade (Fig. 11). This is one of the most extravagant pieces of Baroque architecture in England. Movement and variation abound. There are different pediments to the windows, the curly scroll patterns perhaps inspired by Henry Bell’s work in Northampton, in Kings Lynn, and the courtyard at Kimbolton Castle (now Cambridgeshire). The capitals of the Corinthian columns have the Germaine hawk motif instead of the front scroll; the military trophy records Germaine’s service alongside the Duke of Marlborough, but the six busts on pedestals above the windows do not seem to have any obvious iconography.¹² The whole façade is bounded by banded fluted Doric pilasters. The carving in Ketton



Fig. 12. Drayton House, the base of the Walnut Stair, showing the stone floor with black insets. (Author)

stone is exemplary, and a great tribute to Benjamin Jackson and his carvers.

The contract, of course, is with Jackson as master mason, so is only concerned with building work. There is no surviving agreement with Talman himself nor is there any surviving agreement with carpenters or joiners. There is therefore, alas, no documentation for the most important and prominent feature of the period, a spiral cantilever or hanging stair of timber, rising the full height of the 1580s tower (Fig. 12). It is described in the 1710 Inventory as ‘the Great hanging Staircase’ but is known today as the Walnut Stair since its balusters are walnut, although the basic construction is oak. The huge oak treads have been given a bolection-type moulding on their undersides, to some degree disguising its massive



Fig. 13. Drayton House, the final baluster of the Walnut Stair. (Author)

patterned with black diamond (slate?) insets of the Talman period which extends from the staircase back to the Hall, its pattern being overlaid by the base of the stair. It must therefore have been erected after the floor was laid. It would give us a date between 1702–3, or possibly a little earlier, since it could be almost the first thing that was done. Was it the catalyst which inspired the whole Talman phase? It is clearly the work of a master joiner, and Talman is the obvious person who would have known of a craftsman of that capacity. Unfortunately, the Drayton Archive is silent regarding a name. It has been a little altered, probably by J.A. Gotch of Kettering, who did much work in the house in the early 1900s, having been given a new handrail and the heads of the balusters cut back to accommodate the change. It must originally have had a wider and probably flatter rail, and it now ends rather feebly with a single baluster, an odd effect, and there must originally have been a more substantial finish with a final loop or scroll (Fig. 13).

Putting all these elements together shows that Talman inspired a complete refashioning of the main block of Drayton House and if this thesis is accepted his work here is amongst his most significant surviving.

construction. It is exceptional for the period and now seems to be unique in England for its date. It would of course have replaced a staircase of the 1580s, and there are sections of just such a staircase, obviously reconstructed, within the low southern tower. It would seem therefore, that, at some point during discussions with Talman, it must have been decided to replace the old staircase and re-use it, but this could only have happened when the southern tower on the west front had been constructed. It was certainly already there in 1703, since a bill for plasterwork from David Lance in rooms adjoining the King's Dining Room records one of them being next to 'the Round Stair'. It must be part of Talman's work, since it is erected on top of a stone flagged floor

APPENDIX

THE TALMAN CONTRACT¹³

Articles of agreement Made, agreed and Concluded on by and between the Honable Sr John Jarmaine and Mr Benjamin Jackson ye 24th day of Augt 1702

Imprim: The said Mr Benjamin Jackson doth by these p'sants Covenant promise and agree with ye said Sr John Jarmaine to build Certaine Roomes at Drayton, as a Kitching and offices to it with Stoves and Ovens and other Conveniences, and two Sarvants Halls, and other Roomes with a Stayre Casse as it is drawn discribed, and set down in the ground plat by Mr Tallman & the up-right of ye Said building to be performed according to the Draft made

also by Mr Tallman, And to build a Strong Tower with a Cupolow answerable to the Designe thereof Drawne, and the Ruffe Stone worke of ye buildings to be in goodnesse answerable and agreeable to the goodness of the Tower now standing at Drayton, And the waalles of all ye Building to be built in Thickness according to what Mr Tallman hath ordered and Set down in paper signed by Mr Jackson, And ye said Mr Jackson is also to build another Cupolow for the Tower yt is now Standing at Drayton, And to set the same up answerable to yt wch is designed to be built for ye new Tower, and to make a paire of Circular Stayres of Stone for ye said Tower from the bottom to ye toop thereof, and to Turne Arches of free stone for ye Kitching Chimney, and also to turne a Vault under ye Tower to secure the spring of Water wch serves ye House from hurt and dammage, And also to finish ye front of ye house against ye comeing into Drayton Hall wth heads, vauses, and flames or pine Aples upon pedistalls in all points according to ye Draft or ,designe drawn by Mr Tallman, and to performe all his Work well Rought Strong and fine, And to make all ye Windowes of free-stone for the said buildings And to find good quines of free-stone for all ye Corners of ye building, & free-stone for ye finishing ye front, and also for ye Battlements Round the said Building, And free-stone for all other places Where it is proper and Necessary for the Building to make it firm, strong and good: And further the said Mr Jackson is to pull down all ye old Building Walls where he is to make ye new building and to sheed out all old stone fit for use and to imply ye same, And what more Ruff stone there will be wanting is to be provided at ye cost and charge of the said Sr John Jarmain, and all Lime, Sand and Morter, and carrages for all ye free stone and all other Materiall, Which are to be layd Down as near and Convenient as ye ground will afford, or alow of, And when ye Stone are shed and picked out of ye Morter and Rubbish, then ye said Rubbish is to be carred away at ye cost and charge of Sr John Jarmaine.

And ye said Benjamin Jackson doth by these

p'sants further Covenant promise and agree to build a new Dore Casse for ye Lobby Dore yt goes out into ye garden according to ye Draft thereof Drawne, and to new lay and alter ye Stayre Casse going from ye dore downe into ye Garden, & to make a half space in ye middle of those Stayres. And also to make an Oval Stayre Casse of ye best Ketton Stone to go down out of ye gravel Garden into ye pond Orchard, according to ye designe drawn, And also to make a Stayre Casse from the Hall to lead up to ye Dineing Roome Dore of ye best whit Ketton Stone, to be layd and fixed into the Wall to be made hanging Stayres Strong, & well Rought. And also to Dress over and make good what is wanting in two pare of Peers, and Set them up one pare at ye end of Pell-mell and ye other against ye horse Closse.

And in Case any alteration should be made in any of ye Buildings afore mentioned otherwise than is by ye Draft designed, and intended, yt should either increase or Lessen ye said work, that then and in such casse ye Same to be referred to judgment of able Worke men to determine yt Matter & the pay to be increased or deminished accordingly.

And the said Sr John Jarmaine doth Covenant and promise to pay the said Benjamin Jackson or his order, he performing ye Worke well Rought and firmly done according to ye designes aforementioned, and finishing ye same by ye Later end of May, or ye middle of June next, the Summe of Eight hundred Twenty five pounds of Lawfull Money of England, and to be paid ye same from time to time according to ye propotion of Worke done, and to doe and performe all other things that appertaine, or belong to him, to do and performe,

In Witnesse whereof ye parties have here unto set there hands and Seales the day and year first written above

Benj: Jackson (*sealed*)

In the presents of

Will. Lane¹⁴

John Bonnet

Nicholas Hicces

M. before ye Sealing of These presents it is agreed yt the said Sr John Jarmain is to find Materialls for Scaffeling, and Cord, and post for to be Set up a sheed, or hovel for his men to worke under, and Such Lead, and Iron as is necessary to be used in the Building.

The said Worke afore mentioned is to be well and substantially done & finished at, or before ye foure & twenty day of June next & if any neglect of Mr Jackson, or his worke men be in yt matter if ye worke be not finished at ye time afore said, then ye said Mr Jackson is be these presents to forfitt one hundred pounds, and ye same to be deducted out of his pay.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The material used in this article is in the Drayton Archive and is published by kind permission of Charles Stopford Sackville.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Talman's contribution to Drayton is outlined in John Heward and Robert Taylor, *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire*, (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England, 1996), but this article amplifies and extends their thesis.
- 2 G.F. Webb, 'Drayton House', *Archaeological Journal*, 110 (1953), pp. 188–9.
- 3 This curious work is thought to be the work of Henry, second Earl of Peterborough, Halstead being a synonym. Only about twenty copies were printed.
- 4 The wing is dated 1584.
- 5 Webb's work at Drayton is discussed by the present author in 'John Webb at Drayton House', *Georgian Group Journal*, 14 (2004), pp. 187–198.

- 6 See also John Martin Robinson, *The Dukes of Norfolk* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 142–147.
- 7 Geoffrey Beard, 'William Winde and interior design', *Architectural History*, 27, 1984, p. 155.
- 8 The original glazing of these very tall sashes was replaced in 1795 when the Hall was redecorated. It is not clear how the room was decorated in Talman's scheme.
- 9 The two cisterns still exist, used for house plants in two of the hall window recesses. Remains of some of the other marble work, niche backs and head cornices were discovered in an outbuilding in 1986, all allowing a reasonably good idea of how the room looked: see Bruce Bailey in *The Furniture History Society, Newsletter* No. 170 (May 2008), pp. 5–7.
- 10 There is an undated plan of the hall and buffet room by Sir James Thornhill showing the layout in the British Library (British Library, 1884–7–26, p. 41). Was there a thought of him painting the hall ceiling perhaps?
- 11 It is thought that this low tower replaced the medieval hall bay and a staircase giving access to the medieval great chamber above the undercroft.
- 12 There are on each side two female heads and one male head. The central lady on the right has flowers while that on the left has wheat ears, suggesting the Seasons, but the other heads have no attributes, save the male head to the right of the doorway who has a flame issuing from his chest. Signifying what? They seem a very distinctive set perhaps deriving from engravings.
- 13 This is a slightly amended transcript with original spelling etc. restored. It also corrects a slight misreading of the manuscript. Also the first witness name was mis-transcribed. It is for William Lane who was Steward to Germaine, his signature being clear from other documents. The other two names may well be Jackson's men.
- 14 William Lane was steward at Drayton. The identity of the other two persons is unclear.