

VARIATIONS ON A VENETIAN THEME

As has been seen, throughout history, a limited stock of mechanical systems have provided a seemingly endless supply of practical solutions to problems related to fenestration. By responding imaginatively to material circumstance, and exploiting relevant technological advances, a rich heritage of window forms have thus been created which, in turn, formed the basis for future development. In reality this process was not driven purely by functional concerns. Aesthetic and social preferences played significant roles in determining the final outcome of this type of selection, which, during the period in question, was largely conditioned by historic precedent. In stylistic terms, too, there is not an infinite range of forms available: a window's outward shape achieves a delicate balance between the demands of functional purpose, decorative taste and material capacity – conditions that are perennial. The formal disposition of windows on the façade of a building likewise comply with these demands, forming recognizable patterns that one associates with the architectural language of a particular period or school of thought. We have already looked at this process from the broader perspective. It remains to be seen how a particular window form evolved over time as part of the fruitful combination of borrowing, adapting and invention that constitutes architectural design.

The origin of the Serlian window motif, variously called 'Venetian' or 'Palladian', is actually Roman – the basic arrangement occurs, for example,

68. Lilford Hall,
Northamptonshire, 1635,
south front showing
stepped 'Venetian'
windows in the gables.
(Ralph Dutton, *The English
Country House*, 1935)



in the Arch of Titus, Rome. It was adopted by the Italian Renaissance, being reconfigured as a window format comprising a wide central arched light flanked by two narrower rectangular lights and decorated with the classical orders. The type became especially popular in the Veneto from the mid-sixteenth century onwards under the influence of architects like Sebastiano Serlio and Andrea Palladio. It subsequently became part of the repertoire of the Northern Renaissance.

The seventeenth century

Inigo Jones introduced the window motif in its Italianate form into this country in early designs of 1608 and, in a built form, at the Queen's Chapel, St James's Palace (1623–27). He used Venetian windows in several of his domestic designs, but, after his death, apart from the work of his follower, John Webb, the pure Italianate format of the Venetian window fell into disuse. In the vernacular, however, some interesting permutations of the Serlian window motif appeared during the seventeenth century. First there is the proto-Venetian stepped tripartite lights with hood moulds, to be seen, for example in the gables of Lilford Hall, Northamptonshire (1635) (Figure 68). The origin in this case (if it is, indeed, an import) is most likely to have been the Low Countries, for a potential source can be identified: Wendel

69. Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland, Holy Trinity Church, 1650–52. Originally all the Venetian windows in the building were of the stepped variety. Some still survive in the clerestory.



Dietterlin's *Architectura* (1594–98).⁶⁹ This cropped variety can be found in both houses and churches during the first half of the seventeenth century. Apart from Lilford Hall, they occur at Shipton Hall, Shropshire, c. 1600; Dorfold, Cheshire, c. 1615; Wroxton Abbey, Oxfordshire, 1617; Ludston Hall, Shropshire, c. 1620; and in Yorkshire, at East Riddlesden Hall (c. 1640) and Woodlane Hall, Sowerby (1649). Timothy Mowl considers this window type a late-Gothic response to the classical import and points to its appearance in a group of Dorset churches including Holy Trinity, Leweston (1616) and St Lawrence, Folke (1628), prior to their prominent use in St Katherine Kree, London (1628–31).⁷⁰ The latter church was the likely model for Holy Trinity Church, Berwick (1650–52), which originally had stepped tripartite windows throughout (Figure 69). An over-zealous mid-nineteenth-century restorer, noting the proto-Venetian credentials of the windows at Holy Trinity, converted the majority of these into purer Venetian windows, albeit of an anaemic quality. Whatever the reason for their adoption in church architecture, in the houses mentioned above these windows all occur in the gables and the stepped shape may, therefore, simply have been a practical response to that location.

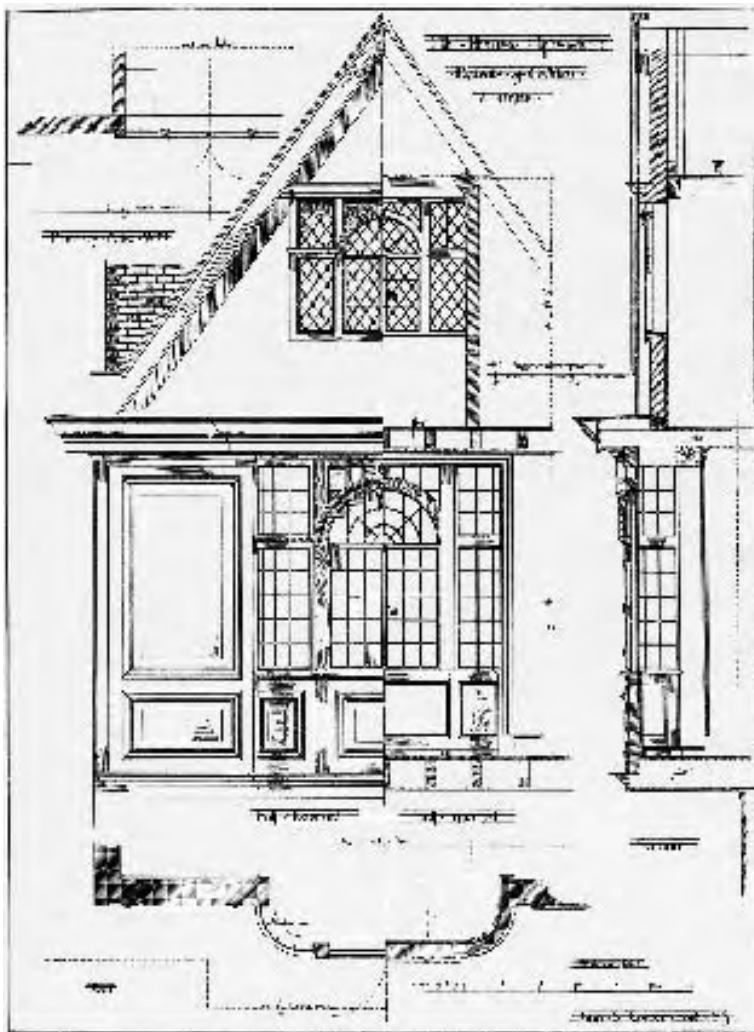
The window form that actually caught on had the characteristic tripartite arrangement of the classical Serlian motif integrated into the rectangular framework of the window. A flattened Mannerist version, executed in stone, formed part of the repertoire of window forms employed by the London master bricklayer and architect, Peter Mills, for example at Thorpe Hall, Peterborough (1654–56) (Figure 70), and again at Pembroke College, Cambridge (1659).⁷¹ A rare brick version survives in the Town Hall, Watlington, Oxfordshire (1665), but wood was the usual framing material for this variant of the Venetian window. Wooden windows of this type appear in both brick and timber-framed construction of the period. In the former the window is set flush in the wall. Good examples of this configuration survive at Stalham Old Hall, Norfolk (c. 1660) (Figure 71), and in the north elevation of a late seventeenth-century house at the south end of Lady Peckett's Yard, York (c. 1680–90). In timber-framed buildings, too, there are examples of such windows set flush with the wall, as in No. 78 Bank Street, Maidstone, Kent, but the trend was to incorporate them in either bay or bow windows. Judging from the number of these in engravings of old houses this latter type of window was particularly popular in London, both in the flat and bay-windowed version, but there seem to be no survivors in the capital. A more sophisticated variety of this indigenous wooden 'Venetian' window type is the famous 'Ipswich window', named after the beautiful bow windows that survived at the Sparrowe's House, Ipswich (Figure 72). The iron folding

70. Thorpe Hall, near Peterborough, 1654–56, east front, Peter Mills.





71. Stalham Old Hall,
Norfolk, c. 1660.
(English Heritage, NMR)



72. Ipswich, Suffolk,
Sparrow's House, late
1660s. A measured
drawing of the side
elevation by J. S. Corder.
(*The British Architect*,
April 1884)

casements and a dedication to Charles II suggest that these windows were either installed or altered in the late 1660s although the house itself may date from *c.* 1650. An even more complex two-storey version of this type from the late seventeenth century survives in No. 126 High Street, Oxford (Figure 73).

73 (left). No. 126 High Street, Oxford, late seventeenth-century timber façade with variations on the Serlian theme.

74 (right). Charlton House, Greenwich, 1607, central Venetian bay window. (Michael Tutton)

Although the inspiration came from abroad, the way in which these Classical window motifs were grafted onto the traditional fenestration patterns in England is of considerable interest and, I believe, unique in the context of the Northern Renaissance. The process started early, at Burghley House, Lincolnshire, with the two flanking Venetian loggias, built between 1564 and 1587, in the inner court. There the Flemish connection is recorded, although the arrangement has a distinct local flavour. With the central bay window at Charlton House, Greenwich (1607–12), the motif is already fully assimilated in the Jacobean idiom (Figure 74), and this alternative

