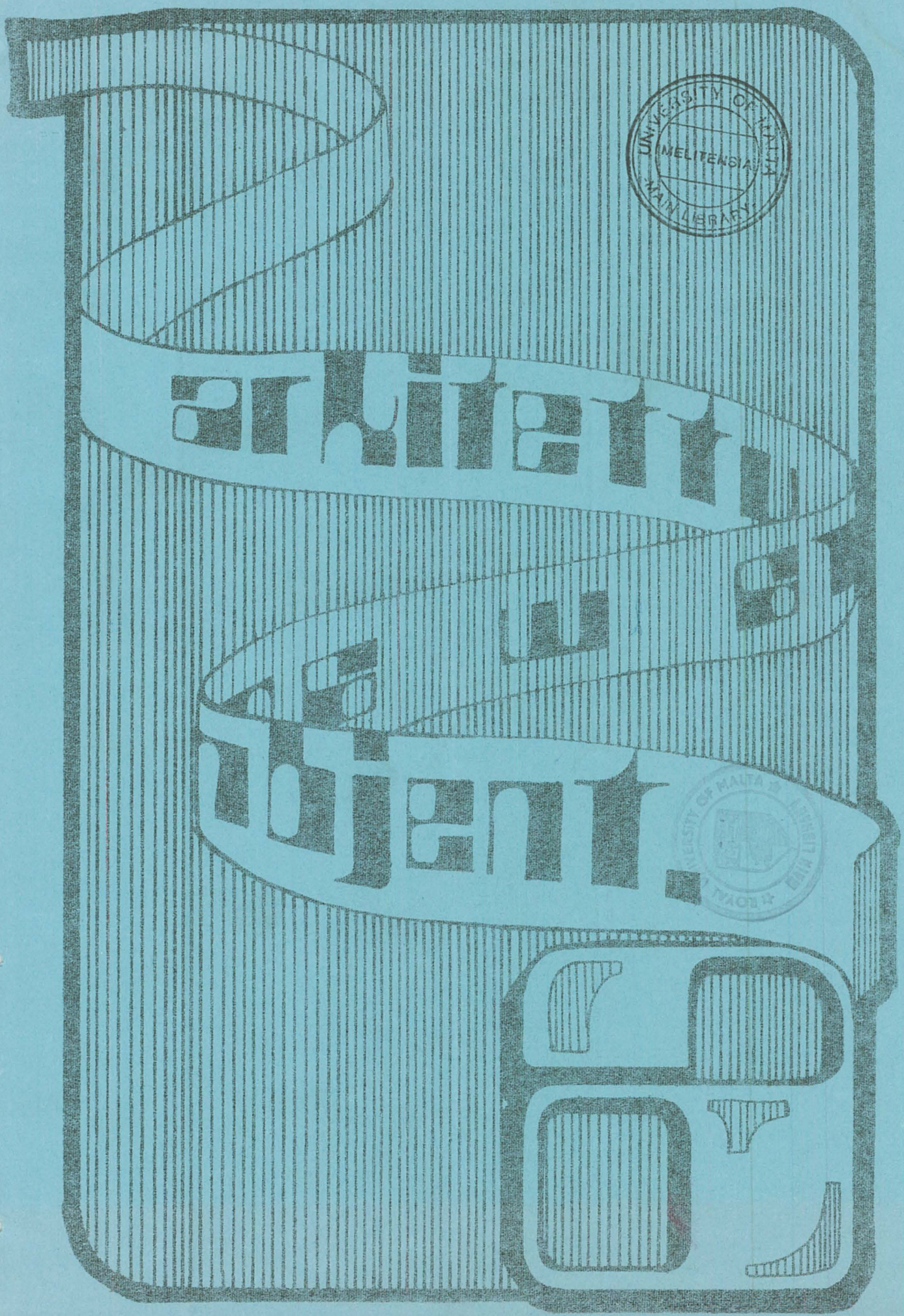

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'A-Arkitettura w Ambjent',
Architecture Dept.,
University of Malta.

Back numbers are also available at the above address.

editorial.

TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

The forthcoming reforms in tertiary education will definately affect the present structure of the B.E.&A. course. Talk of restructuring the course has been going on ever since mention of the reforms had been hinted. This restructuring will be expected to take into consideration the new concept of student worker.

In principle the introduction of the student worker concept has a number of positive attributes. Giving the student an opportunity to touch and be on actual work sites and offices would definitely be beneficial. The rigidity of the six month study - six month work scheme is what is very dubious. To most this looks too rigid a method for an educational scheme and more flexibility is desireable. Other question marks still lie behind entry qualifications and actual year to year examinations, both written and practical. On these subjects only a vague outline has been revealed. Until more details are released we reserve our right of comment.

Worth considering would be the setting up of an Arch. & Civil Eng. School which would take up actual projects and 'use' the students themselves to complete them. Such activity has been put in practise in other countries with considerable success. In this way the student would receive direct financial assistance together with much needed experience gained by being on actual work sites, meeting and communicating with people from all sectors of the building industry. However, it must be stressed that the academic staff must have continuous contact with such practical work so as to ensure desireable standards.

Now that the date for 'Reformation Time' is getting nearer we hope that the Authorities would HONESTLY consult suggestions submitted by both student and staff representatives. We earnestly hope that when, at last, these reforms arrive, they will all attempt to brighten the student's gloomy future and not be to his detriment.

4th January, 1978.

buildings of to-day.

BY J.M.GALEA

THE NATIONAL THEATRE - LONDON

Way back in 1949, the British Parliament passed a bill acknowledging in principle the responsibility of the State to provide the nation with a National Theatre. Two years later, in 1951, a foundation stone was laid by Royalty close to the Festival Hall on the South Bank of the Thames.

Eighteen more years elapsed before the next 'stone' was laid! Work began on the site in 1969 and just over a year ago, on October 25th 1976, the new National Theatre was officially opened.

The Architect

The architect of the project, Denys Lasdun, who was awarded the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture last year, was selected by a specially constituted committee, set up in the 60s, under the chairmanship of Sir Laurence Olivier. He had never designed a theatre before (one critic said that perhaps this was the reason why his "building is such a jolly good show" Architectural Record, Sep. 1977). From the start the building committee decided against holding a definitive competition, which they felt would deprive them of participating in the planning process. The problem of selecting an architect was solved with the help of RIBA who arranged a preliminary competition to select twenty winners. The selected twenty, out of a total of some three hundred, were then called for an interview. Sir Laurence Olivier, speaking about the interviews (Arch. Review 1/77), makes one realise the importance of a good architect being somewhat of a good salesman too. He describes how some, like the late Sir Basil Spence, never went at all - "I've got enough work for 500 years, so don't bother me". Others, like Philip Johnson from New York, showed up with all their "henchmen" and looked very impressive, (probably making the "client" uneasy).

DL showed up alone. He answered all the questions put to him, and played on the emotions of the panel "..... surely the most important aspect of what we are talking about is the spirtual one". (Architectural Review, January 1977).
He got the job.

Site

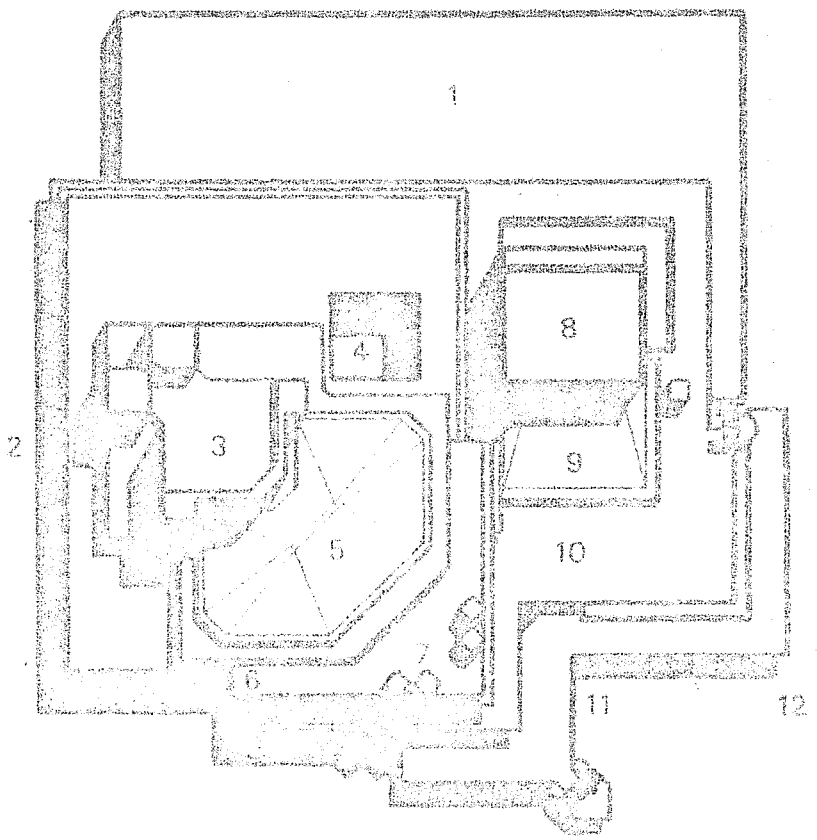
Lasdun's NT sits, long and low, on its site on the South Bank of the Thames where the river begins the turn into King's Reach and sweeps round towards the city. It is just a little downstream from Waterloo Bridge and across the river from Somerset House. The site commands a panoramic vista of London from the spiky, Gothic, Houses of Parliament to the majestic dome of St. Paul's. The immediate area around the National Theatre includes the Royal Festival Hall, the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the Hayward Gallery and the National Film Theatre.

First Impressions

When I visited the National for the first time it was early on a rather overcast and dismal Sunday morning in September. From the North Bank, the building appeared like a number of horizontal decks, pinned together and held down by bold mertical structures punching through the topmost layer. The horizontal trays cast deep shadows at each level, even with the uniform lighting conditions of the gloomy London weather. Denys Lasdun describes this impression perfectly: "it is an architecture without facades but with layers of building, like geological strata, ...". In the vicinity of the theatre very few people were around, on that Sunday morning. The neighbourhood, which is not exciting on the best of days, seemed even more depressing and the bare and unadorned whitish-grey concrete of the building made it appear dark and sombre. However, walking around the terraces and moving over the various levels around the building the magic of its architecture began to work on me.

The "horizontal layers of building" which are the dominant elements especially from across the river are smooth coffered concrete trays forming the floors of the building and their extension into terraces. These are supported by bold, massive, board-marked, concrete columns, located on a grid which is not easy to determine at first. Inside, behind the glass I could see the carpeted foyers and the Corb. staircases joining the different levels. At first glance, these three materials, carpeting, concrete and glass appeared to be the only ones used.

Above the main entrance, which is set on the diagonal rise the four square towers of the lift shafts, while beyond them rise the blank walls of the flytower of the main theatre (the Olivier)



1 workshops
2 stage door
3 Olivier fly tower
4 open court
5 Olivier auditorium
6 foyers
7 lifts
8 Lyttleton fly tower
9 Lyttleton auditorium
10 foyers
11 main entrance
12 box office

and to its right that of the second theatre (the Lyttleton). These elements are dramatically floodlit at night.

The only disappointing external side of the theatre is its rear, a massive blank wall screening off the workshop area.

But what I had seen on that Sunday morning was enough to make me want to know more about it, visit it again and investigate further.

The Brief

Originally the brief called for one supremely adaptable space which could be used for all kinds of theatrical performances. Although technologically this is not impossible, to cater for productions ranging from the Elizabethan to the post-experimental meant that several compromises would have to be made and that most of the funds necessarily have to go towards mechanical equipment. The brief was therefore modified and the National as built actually comprises three theatres: the Olivier, the Lyttleton and the Cottesloe.

The Olivier

The Olivier is the largest of the three theatres and seats some 1,150. It may safely be said that the Olivier is the National Theatre. The basic plan is a quarter circle with an open stage at the corner. The seating is broken down into sections on different levels and each section is at an angle from the other. The boundary between audience and actors is blurred. Some rows are practically on the same level as the performing areas; it would be absurd to talk of a stage. The plan has ensured that no seat is further than 23 metres from the performance. Inside the Olivier, the audience occupy the same space as the actors and feel at one with them and with each other; there is a rare sense of continuity between the stalls and the upper tiers. The atmosphere is one of intimacy and one willingly lingers on inside even when the performance is over.

The Olivier is to be the home of the National Company where it presents its all-year repertoire.

The Lyttleton

Sharing the same main entrance with the Olivier is the second main theatre, the Lyttleton. This is a more conventional rectangular proscenium theatre seating some 890 people in two tiers of stalls and circle. The stage at one end has an adjustable proscenium arch allowing a variety of openings depending on the type of production in progress. The theatre is intended to be used by the National Company for seasons of new plays, for the work of a particular playwright, for productions built round a chosen theme, as well as for visiting theatrical companies.

The Cottesloe

The last theatre, the Cottesloe, is at a lower level than the other two and has a separate access on the East side of the building. It may seat audiences up to 400 people, and has been called the National Theatre's "laboratory for the future". The last theatre of the three to open (it was still not functioning on the official opening day) it consists of a simple box with all the walls painted black. Galleries ring the box on three sides while the fourth is left free to allow for various staging concepts. A variety of seating arrangements is possible and, if required, the floor may be raised to stage height.

In terms of equipment the Cottesloe is much more modest than the other two but this is expected to be increased as the possibilities of this theatre are discovered with use. The Cottesloe will accommodate productions by both visiting and regional companies.

The building is based on an overlay of two grids based on the axis of the two main theatres. The Olivier's is at 45° to that of the Lyttleton, and accounts for the diagonally located main entrance. It also locates the lift shafts, the placing of the columns, and the coffering of the floor trays, giving the ceiling the familiar "diagrid" form with coffers at 45° to the perimeter beams. The main staircases with their half-hexagon half-landings split open in the middle are determined by the superimposition of the two grids.

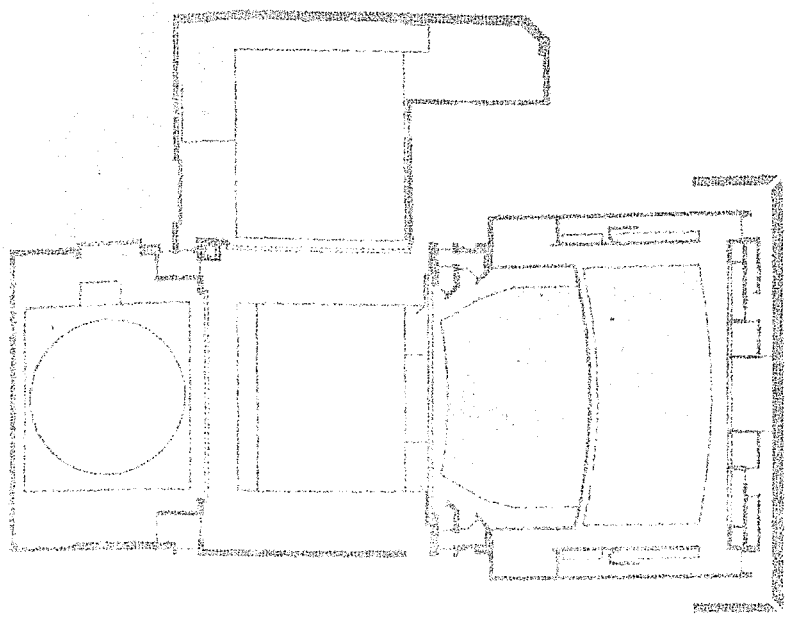
The "Fourth Theatre"

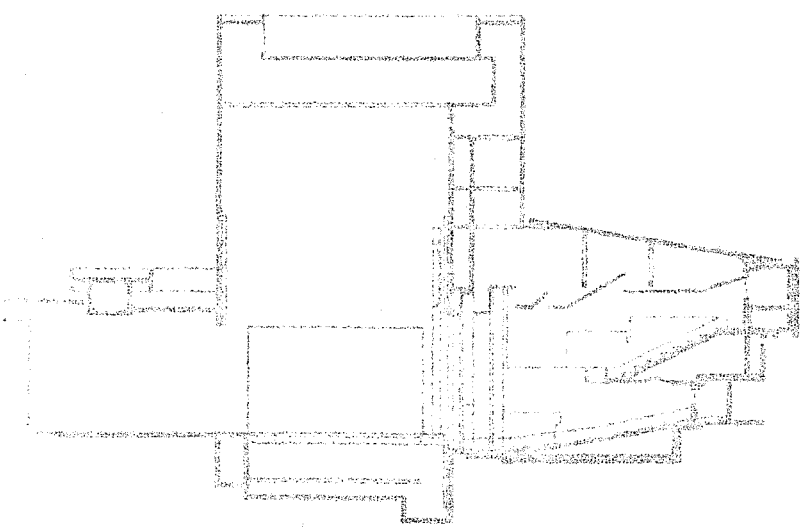
Lasdun speaks of a fourth theatre in his project. He is referring to the foyers, the public spaces, the terraces and riverside walks around the National Theatre and "their interrelationship with the city, the river, the street life, the people".

The extensive foyer spaces, which are open both to patrons of the theatres and general public alike, are indeed one of the most fascinating experiences of the National and quite worth a visit for their own sake. For the theatre-goer the intervals are fun, no longer an irritating session of elbowing and jostling for a drop of the good stuff to see them through the next act. For the general public, who may have wandered in from the extensive riverside terraces at three different levels to browse round the bookshops or enjoy the fare at the restaurant, overlooking the river and the foyers, or one of the National's eight bars, the intervals are a spectacle in themselves.

In the foyers the inside-outside feeling is supreme. The unconventional geometry of the building combined with generous glazing gives rise to delightful vignettes of London across the Thames from several points in the foyers.

The bold massive columns rise from their foundations to pierce the building volumes, combining the several layers of space into one dynamic whole. This effect is heightened by the lighting of





Lyttelton

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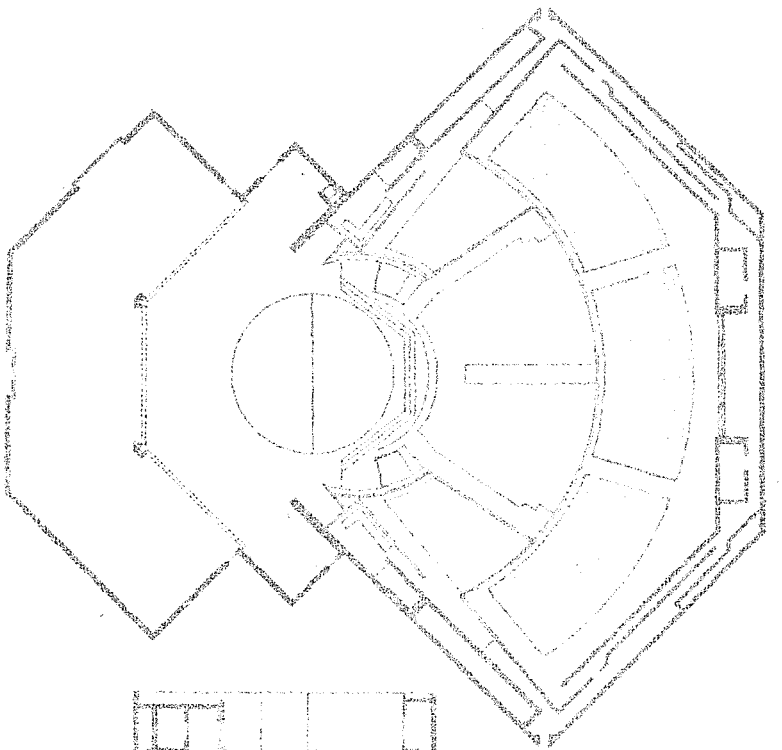
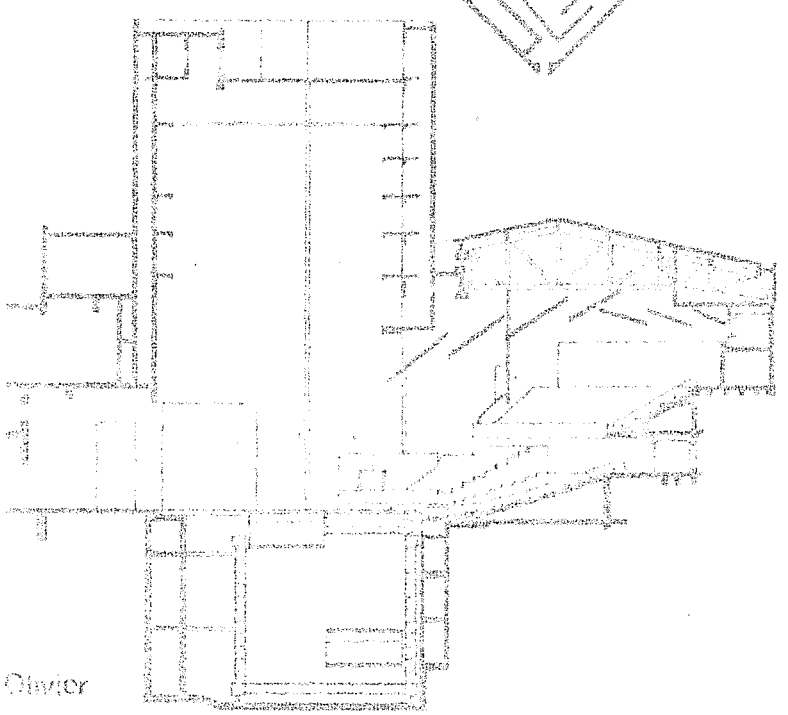
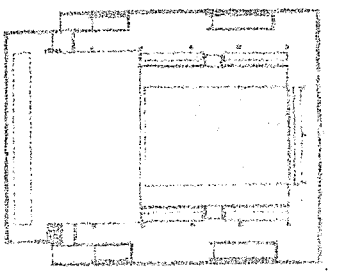
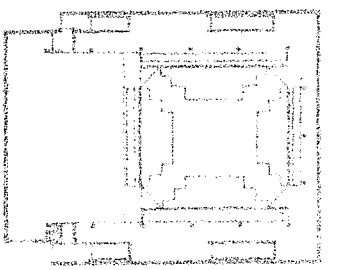
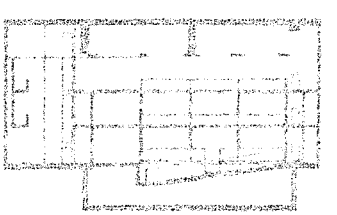




Olivier







Cottesloe

these columns, done mainly from below from special fittings inset into the ground at their base. This uplighting emphasises their height and abrasive concrete texture and is perhaps one of the main contributors to the dramatic excitement which pervades the people-filled foyer spaces at night.

Service Spaces

The rest of the building consists of the usual service spaces which such a building demands, administrative offices, rehearsal and dressing rooms, green rooms, wardrobe and a veritable interior street of workshops at the rear. Parking for 400 cars together with the required plant room necessary for environmental control are also generously provided.

Conclusion

The real success of the theatres can only be judged in time, but the full houses they have been generating agurs well for the future. For his "fourth theatre" to be successful Lasdun has suggested that residential development be carried out in the neighbourhood of the National to put back life into the area. Architecturally the building is fine, but the more people use it the better it would be. Architecture without people is meaningless.

There have been those (there always are, everywhere) who had protested that the National Theatre built at one of the worst moments in the U.K's economic history, was too much "cake when we only need bread", and that the money could be spent better in other ways (remember Judas and the ointment money?). But now that the National Is there everybody is glad to have it. Here in Malta we would even be glad if a step similar to that taken by the U.K. Government almost thirty years ago is taken regarding our national theatre!

Cont'd from over .....

In his meeting with MCAST students on Monday, 28th November, the Prime Minister made continuous reference to the re-organisation of the Civil Engineering Department. He went further by pointing out that the Government had put in considerable effort to bring over a suitable person from abroad to head this re-organisation. Very well and true up to the day of the P.M.'s address the said person was indeed on the island, having already put in a considerable work load in his scheme for the mentioned re-organisation. However, it was indeed strange to all of us how a few days after, we came to know of his sudden departure. He did give his reasons for this, however we feel we cannot comment on these since we are ignorant of what went on behind the scenes.

These events leave us to ponder about the situation now existing in the Civil Engineering Department. With the departure of Mr. Towler the headship has been automatically vacated. January sees the start of a new term and it is our ardent hope that these recent happenings will not have a negative effect on us students. Internal matters of the Department have to be resolved by the start of the new term otherwise we will be in for a lean period indeed.

***

In Babylon!

Second year students are not that all enthusiastic about the type of Mathematics contained in their syllabus for the first term. In a recent conversation with the present tutor, it was learnt that this syllabus, was a result of consultations between last year's Civil Engineering Department (Mr. E. Abela and Mr. J. Saliba) and the Mathematics Department of the University. With recent talk of re-organisation in the Civil Engineering Department (recall Mr. Towler's departure) it is hoped that no time will be spared to hold fresh talks with the present constituents of this Department to revise the syllabus. We are sure that if such talks are held a number of changes would emerge. Mathematics, beneficial to the Architect and Civil Engineer, should be the only criterion for inclusion in our syllabus.

Apathy

Apathy is, a six-lettered word,
And listen ye Gentlemen to what I've heard.
A story about, those nasty boys,
for whom plans and models are everyday toys.
The story goes that for most of them,
OUT OF CURRICULUM - they don't give a damn!
As long as the project is in, in time,
Any other activity will be a big crime!
APATHY is a Golden Word,
(for those people who PRETEND)
That this story they haven't heard!

(BILON)

***STOP PRESS .... STOP PRESS

This part of the feature has been written before 11th January 1978. We are pleased to report that since then we have learnt that talks between the Mathematics Department and the present Civil Engineering Department at MCAST, to review the Mathematics syllabus, are scheduled for later this month. A student representative has been invited to take part.

letters to the editor.

Dear Sir,

RESERVOIRS - WHAT BENEFIT???

As I am sure all readers are aware of, here in Malta we have an acute water shortage problem. To help in solving this problem Government has been building various reservoirs to catch and store water runoff, especially from our main roads. This, in itself, is a very good idea but I think it is lacking in one important aspect.

However, before arriving at the crux of the problem, I would like to say something about reservoirs. Basically these are of two types: (a) Those that collect water and store it; (b) Those that collect water and let it drain slowly into the aquafer or the water collected is transferred to other storage reservoirs by means of bowsers, i.e., serve as catchment areas (strictly speaking these should not be referred to as reservoirs, but for argument's sake I will keep calling them so). Usually these reservoirs have a large surface area and a relatively shallow depth.

The problem is that most of the water being collected is again being lost to the atmosphere through evaporation. They hydrologic definition of evaporation is, the net rate of vapour transport to the atmosphere. The rate of evaporation is influenced not only by solar radiation and air temperature (as is usually assumed by the layman), but also by vapour pressure, wind speed and atmospheric pressure. Since solar radiation is one of the most important factors, evaporation varies with latitude, season, time of day and sky conditions. However, here in Malta, owing to our exposed position and owing to the high wind speeds which we get, wind is another very important factor promoting evaporation. Evaporation is also directly proportional to the surface area being considered - the bigger the surface area, the greater the volume of water being evaporated.

To stress the effects of evaporation one need only say that once every twelve days all the water in the atmosphere is replaced due to this effect. Hence bearing in mind the proportions of our reservoirs, our relatively high air temperature and solar radiation, even in winter, and our high wind speeds, one could easily deduce why evaporation is causing such a considerable loss of very precious water.

So, what could be done to overcome this problem? One might immediately suggest some kind of solid roofing for our reservoirs, becuase, since the reservoirs being referred to, collect the bulk of the water from runoff of nearby roads, the quantity of the water collected directly from the surface is relatively small and hence could be neglected. However, such a solution would tend to be quite expensive and it does lessen the catchment of the reservoir. Better solutions use the surface of the water itself to act as a ceiling for the reservoir. All of these consist of floating some material on the surface of the water, thus disrupting the effects of evaporation. This material varies: from the primitive but very efficient way of floating bamboo canes on the surface to floating pieces of jablo and the more sophisticated methods of pouring a very thin layer of various oils all over the surface which tend to hinder evaporation.

By this letter I hope to stress the seriousness of the problem and I hope that my appeals reach the ears of the Authorities concerned so that something could be done towards improving the efficiency of our reservoirs.

Ref:

Water - Life Science Library
Hydrology for Engineers - M. Kohler, R. Linsley & J. Paulhus
Manual of British Water Engineering Practise - Institution of Water Engineers.

FALLING WATERS

Sur Editur,

L-EDUKAZZJONI TERZJARJA LLUM

It-tbigh ta' l-ewwel numru ta' "Arkitettura w Ambjent" huwa pass kbir 'l quddiem lejn il-ksib ta' l-identita' taghna fil-kamp studentesk. Ghax s'issa, l-istudenti ta' l-arkitettura kienu meqjusa fost shabhom bhala nies mohhom biss fl-istudju, izda li ssibhom ukoll kull fejn ikun hemm l-istorbju.

F'okkazjoni ta' din ix-xorta tajjeb illi wiehed jirrifletti ftit: xi tfisser ghalina li nkunu studenti universitarji? Mitt bniedem, mitt fehma! Fost il-mijiet ta' fehmiet jispikkaw xi whud, fosthom: l-istudent universitarju huwa membru ta' klassi elitista, li kif jirfes l-ewwel darba fil-maqdes ta' Tal-Qroqq donnu miss is-sema b'idu w jara 'l kulhadd dubbien.

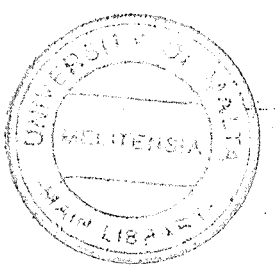
Huwa minnu li fil-passat, meta kienet tithallas il-mizata, il-parti l-kbira ta' l-istudenti kienu gejjin minn familji fil-"high income bracket". Dawn, jew ahjar il-parti l-kbira ta' dawn, kienu jqiesu bhala nferjuri 'l dawk gejjin minn ambjent differenti.

Tul dawn l-ahhar ghoxrin sena, inqatghet il-parti l-kbira ta' din is-superiority complex, ghax issa l-parti l-kbira tal-istudenti universitarji gejjin minn familji mhux professjonisti (bi professjonista, ghall-iskop ta' din l-ittra nifhem tabib, avukat, perit). Fatturi ohra mportanti huma li l-universita' m'ghadiex tipproduci biss professjonisti u li m'ghadiex tithallas il-mizata.

Hemm bzonn, sur editur, li l-istudenti KOLLHA jkunu konxji li l-popolazzjoni ta' pajjiz mhix maghmulha biss minn STUDENTI. Jekk l-universita' tipproduci biss nies li jafu s-suggett li jkunu studjaw fuq ponot subghajhom, u fl-istess hin dawn ma jkollhomx valuri civici, jekk dan jibqa' jsehh, l-EDUKAZZJONI TERZJARJA FALLIET.

Nixtieq permezz ta' din l-ittra, nappella lill-Board Editorjali, biex jibda hu din il-kampanja fost l-istudenti ta' l-Arkitettura. Ghandna hafna fostna li mohhom biss fil-kors. Hemm bzonn li nqanqlu kuxjenza fostna li l-ISTUDENT MHUX QIEGHED BISS BIEX JISTUDJA, IZDA GHANDU D-DMIR LI JIPPARTECIPA BIS-SHIH F'ATTIVITAJIET BARRA L-KURRIKULU, U LI DAWN L'ATTIVITAJIET IKUNU KKUNSIDRATI FIL-MARKI LI JINGHATA FL-AHHAR TAS-SENA.

C. CACOPARDO
10 ta' Novembru, 1977.



Sur Editur,

Kif kulhadd jaf din is-sena akkademika li ninsabu fiha kellna hafna general meetings tal-K.R.S. u li, minhabba fihom, kwazi dejjem inhassru l-lectures halli KULHADD ikun jista' jattendi. Pero', fost l-istudenti tat-tieni sena, qieghed jigri li dawk illi l-aktar ikunu entuzjasti sabiex inhassru l-lectures, hekk kif isiru jafu illi dawn il-lectures gew imhassra, iparpru lejn id-dar bhal sajjetta u ma tarahomx izjed.

Allura, nghid jien, dawn "ix-xempji ta' rgulija" li ghandna fil-kors ma jimpurtahom minn hadd u minn xejn, lanqas mill-futur tal-kors taghhom stess? Dawn "l-irgiel" fejn ikunu? Forsi jkunu qed jahdmu xi progett b'hafna xinxilli jew jieklu l-kotba waqt li xi msejknin ohrajkunu qed "jahlu hinhom" f'affarijiet ta' interess sew ghall-kors kif ukoll ghall-universita' kollha li dawn "l-irgiel" huma parti minnha.

U, mbaghad, dawn "l-irgiel" igergru ghax m'ghandhomx hin jew ghadhom lura!! Ahseb u ara dawk l-imsejknin. Dawn zgur li mhumiex lesti!

C. ELLUL

IN FORTHCOMING ISSUES

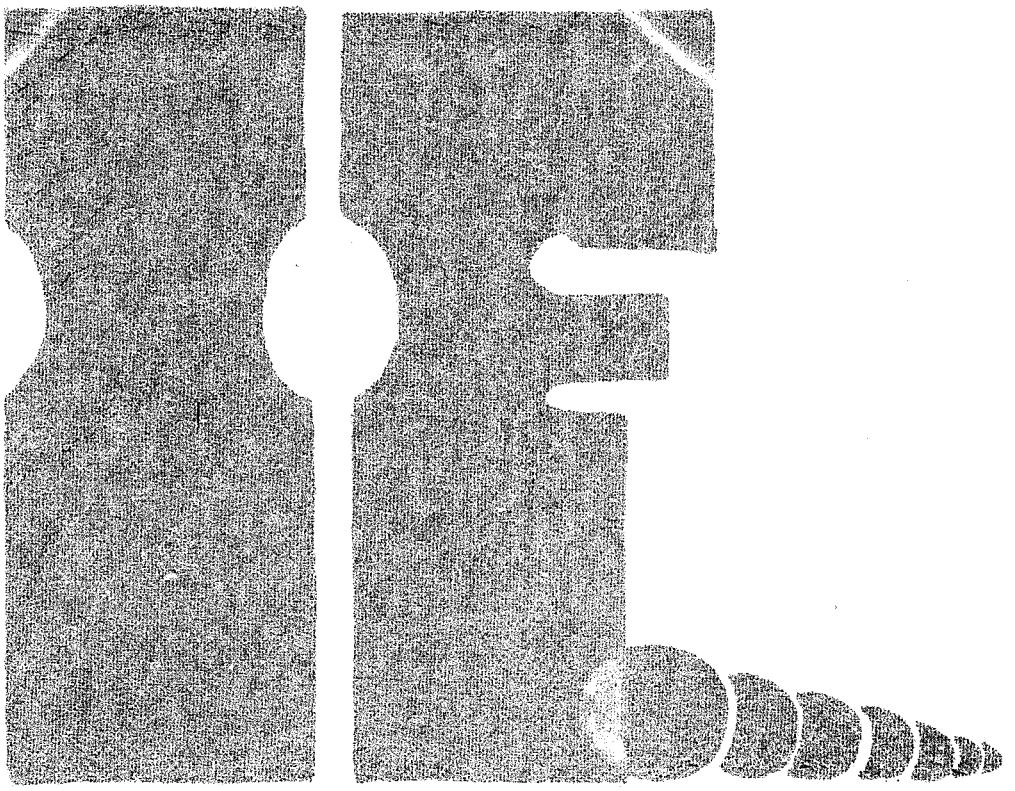
Valletta: Its Military Architecture and Preliminary City Plan (Carmel Cacopardo)

This is a very well researched, lengthy paper which will be published in six parts, starting in the March/April issue. In it the author traces the development of Valletta from the very early sixteenth century when it was still known as "Shebb ir-Raș" and the only building on it was a small crumbling fort called "Torre della Bocca"; Laparelli's original design for this unique town; the building regulations as enforced by the Officium Commissariorum Domorum, right down to the conception of Floriana as its suburb in the former part of the eighteenth century. The text is very easy to follow and all references are very well documented. We hope that the publication of this paper encourages other readers to take up seri s research with results of such a high standard.

A Value-Based Approach to Architectural Decision Taking (Saviour Borg)

This is a very interesting article which will be published in the May/June issue, about the process of CONSCIENTIZATION and how it could be applied to reach decisions on various projects. The author begins by defining "value" and then continues by explaining the four phases in human development. Then he goes on to outline a case study of a one-day session with the fourth year students of the Architecture Department carried out by Fr. Tonna. In this session, by a process known as BRAINSTORMING, the priorities for a competitive design project were obtained. Although the topic is a highly complicated one, the author manages to explain it quite clearly in not so many words.

We would like to remind our readers that contributions are always welcome although we reserve the right of publishing any material submitted.



LE CORBUSIER WOULD HAVE DIED A FRUSTRATED ARCHITECT IF NO EXPOSED CONCRETE WAS ALLOWED ON THE FACADES:

a) His "Unité d'Habitation" is totally treated, externally in exposed concrete.

b) So, too, his magnificent church of Notre-Dame-de-Haut at Ronchamp whose roof is superbly shaped in naked concrete.

c) Also the High Court at Chandigarh, India, which has an enormous concrete canopy running the whole length of the facade.

..... good for him, and his magnificent buildings, that France and India do not prohibit the use of exposed concrete on the facades.

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periodicals

BI-MONTHLY REVIEW C. BUHAGIAR.

Selection from Foreign Periodicals

One of the most interesting periodicals I came across is, "Middle East Construction", (M.E.C. Nov. 1977). This periodical is missing from the list supplied in the last issue and it can be found at the new university (MCAST). As its name suggests, this periodical deals exclusively with construction work in the middle east, discussing the problems, both managerial and technical, involved, and outlining solutions to such problems.

Hence, in this issue is found the article, "The Multi Discipline Approach", which outlines how a Swedish construction company involves itself in all sorts of construction problems. The Vattenbyggnadsbyran (V.B.B.) basically comprises four departments - water supply and sewage treatment, power, town planning and industrial planning. As one notices there is no architectural department but architects are found in each of the other departments and are responsible for the design of buildings and other construction works. The main events in the firm's history are:

1897	Professor Ju Gust Richert established the, "Konstruktionskyra for Vattenkyggnadsbyran" (hydraulic engineering design office).
1903	First work abroad - V.B.B. presented the prize winning proposals in a competition for a new sewerage system at St. Petersburg.
1926	Planned the new water supply system for the city of Rangoon, Burma.
1953 - 1960	First work in Middle East - hydro-electric power plant sited at Aswan Dam.
1962	Won contract to plan and implement a new water supply system for the city of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
1963 - 1970	Moved Abu Simbel Temples to save them from flooding beneath the waters of lake Nasser.

V.B.B. is also responsible for water supply and related sewage disposal and treatment plants for Amman, Jordan, Marhbad, Iran, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and the city of Kuwait. Its most important town planning project is the master plan proposals for the new Egyptian city, Tenth of Ramadam, near Cairo; other such projects were also carried out in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

The most recent completed project of the V.B.B. (earlier this year), is the Kuwait Tower group complex. It consists of three separate towers, the tallest one being 176m above ground level and provides an elevated reservoir of 4,500m^3 capacity, a restaurant and banqueting hall for 200 people, an indoor garden where receptions for 400 people can be held (these are all found in the larger, lower sphere - for drawings see M.E.C.), and a viewing gallery in a separate upper sphere. The second tower is for water storage only and the third tower contains floodlighting equipment. This complex is a landmark in the Gulf and represents one of the most striking instances to date of advanced technology applied to the design of a multi-purpose structure which is unmistakably twentieth century, yet respects traditional, local, architectural values.

Another periodical to be found at the new university is "Concrete" (Nov. 1977). In this issue is found the "Concrete Society Jubilee Award", won by the transformed civic centre in Bolton - Victoria square pedestrianisation. In this scheme, "the use of concrete as a surfacing material reflects the dignity of the civic architecture in the square and creates a suitably urban landscape for the heart of the town". Simple concrete paving using a subdued colour scheme, shows the classical town hall to advantage as the focal point of the town. The colour of the paving closely matches the sandstone of which the town hall is built.

The central area of the square in front of the town hall steps, is free from all ornaments, "so that it may be used for major functions and as a forum for the town's activities". Fountains delinate this area as does the war memorial and a course of setts links together twenty four seating units, each of which contains a plane tree and shrubs. Bollards with black exposed aggregate in a black concrete matrix have been used to protect the war memorial and to define the boundary of the pedestrian precinct with Oxford Street. This street is shopping thoroughfare which possesses some formality due to a similarity in character between the major stores and the bank in the street and the civic buildings in Victoria Square. For this reason Oxford Street has been surfaced in the same manner as the square. The whole area is accessible to traffic in emergency, but it is designed primarily to be convenient and pleasant for the shoppers, residents and visitors on foot.

Concrete was used in the following forms: standard precast paving slabs on a lean mix base to take occasional vehicular traffic, safety curb channels, flint cobbles set in concrete, in situ exposed concrete around manhole covers and other irregularities and precast exposed aggregate copings.

This project rejuvinates an aging but splendid Victorian town centre; it is impressive in size and style; it draws together the old and new buildings, and the social amenity of the areas paved throughout with precast concrete is greatly increased. The civic centre throbs with life and the people of Bolton can take special pride in it.

"Everyday more than two million people pass in and out of Tokyo's Shinjuku district, the world's largest and most real megastructure", writes architect Peter Gluck in the Architectural Record (Sept.1977).

Shinjuku is an example of an indegenous place that reflects the full breadth and complexity of a post-industrial society. Shinjuku is a college, the cumulative result of many independent systems. It is a warehouse of signs - signs of nature, signs of commerce, displays, directions and titillations. Food displays overreach themselves; the entire menu is revealed in exact replica in front of restaurants in plastic models without a single noodle out of place - but the models outdo reality and are an end in themselves.

This megastructure includes four mammoth department stores and three thousand small retail shops, restaurants, bars and other entertainment facilities. Besides there are 150 additional retail establishments such as movies, pin-ball palaces and Mahjongg parlours. The plan is generated by two dependent systems - the apparently self-regulating commercial market and the apparently fulfilled needs and the desires of people who use it everyday. The users are the designers.

Other interesting articles in this issue include: "Triumph on the Thames" - the national theatre in London designed by Denys Lasdun and Partners; "Johns-Manville World Headquarters" - the architects' collaborative (TAC) competitive design has been reproduced with remarkable faithfulness in a magnificent desert site near Denver, resulting in a building of extraordinary strength and beauty; "The Linear Airport comes to maturity at Boston's Logan International" - joint venture architects, John Carl Warnecke & Associates and Desmond & Lord Inc. have recently completed Logan's new South Terminal which represents the fully developed, drive-to-the-gate airport.

In the last issue ("A" Nov/Dec 77) an account was given of Dune House, a double beach house built underneath the sand of a Florida beach. This time, it is the turn of an Underground Farm in Pembroke, Georgia, U.S.A. (Domus Nov 77). In this project the architects' task was to combine the fact of living close to the land with the fact of living off the land into an architectural reality. The place of work and place of living are one. This farm is designed for eight families to be a self supporting community, with facilities for six more families to join later on.

The housing has been designed in such a way that no land is subtracted from the total arable surface. Furthermore, the farm design utilises to the best advantage the insulating properties of the earth, thus diminshing the energy needed to heat and cool the dwellings. Obviously great emphasis had to be made on making the whole thing watertight. For this purpose the walls are lined with fibreglass panels glued at the seams while frost-resistant tiles are used. The structure consists of iron columns placed on a grid supporting a concrete barrel-vault-roofing system. All the energy required for the settlement

is supplied by a communal heliovoltaic system. The south facing collector panels are placed on an earth mound, built up when excavating the site. The harvested grain is stored in silos whose windows are so designed to obtain maximum benefit from the wind in drying the grain.

Other interesting features in this issue include, "In Cortile a Gray" - a complex consisting of refrectory, conference hall and theatre nestling under a freely modelled shell built in the large courtyard of a school; "Gigantesca Immagine" - a complex in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, comprising commercial and public spaces, offices plus all the related recreation facilities; "Per Studenti in Finlandia" - a student village in Turku, consisting of four thousand housing units plus services which include saunas, day-care centres, shops, laundries, hobby clubs and bomb shelters; "Per l'Infanzia a Londra" - a children's hall in the Alexandria Road redevelopment scheme which can accommodate 31 children plus facilities for three senior staff, six house parents, three students and two domestic staff.

In the Architects' Journal of this month (Nov 1977) are found two awards. The first is the Financial Times Industrial Award 1977, which has been won by the Herman Miller furniture factory at Bath, designed by the Farnell/Grimshaw partnership. This factory was praised by its assessors as a "Fine example of the relationship of brilliant, architectural skill, industrial engineering ability and management imagination. It is well sited, beautifully and precisely detailed and with well thought out and sensitive treatment of the surrounding areas ..... internal planning is directed towards possible future needs and is entirely flexible." Other commended schemes are: the Cotton-valley Sewage Treatment Works, Milton Keynes; the Truman brewery, London and the New Boiler House for the Oldam and District General Hospital.

The other award is the D.O.E. Award for good design in Housing. For this competition England was divided into nine regions, i.e., the eastern region, greater London, northern region, the north-western region, the south-eastern region, the south-western region, Yorkshire, Humberside and an award for housing for the disabled. There were 395 entries and fifteen were awarded a gold medal. Amongst the winners the notable ones were: Whitemore Court at Basildon, Essex designed by Ahrend, Burton and Koralek, praised for its sensitivity, superb detail and original form; John King Court at Archway, North London; the Greater London Council; Lydford Estate and the 44 dwelling units complex at Oxford designed by Philip del Nevo of Oxford Architects Partnership which includes a restaurant, lounge and roof deck.

EYESORE

City Gate - a focal point in "dissonant" style - is undoubtedly an eyesore. It tries to achieve an unwarranted monumentality in a style markedly different from that prevalent in Valletta. A theatrical style recalling a stage setting. Its form is further ridiculed by its decoration during Carnival.

talkabout.

R FARRUGIA & A BAILEY

No.2 ST.SEBASTIAN PARISH CHURCH - QORMI

When we came to start compiling this series for 'A - Arkitettura w Ambjent' we drew up a list of possible buildings now under construction that may be considered. A number of churches, as would be expected from a country like 'Catholic' Malta, cropped up. The 'impressive' list included the interesting structure for the Fgura Parish Church, the Santa Teresa Sanctuary in B'Kara, the tal-Erwieh Church in Tarxien and the San Sebastian Parish Church in Qormi. The latter indeed has such an incredible background that we decided to give it priority among these ecclesiastical buildings.

According to the history books, after having been declared a parish the San Sebastian sector of Qormi was in great need of a larger church to meet the needs of an evergrowing community. Indeed work on the new parish church was launched on February of 1940 and the edifice remains uncompleted to this very day. Difficulties financial or otherwise, cropped up at irregular intervals. Constructional and structural difficulties were not lacking and these will be dealt with in later stages of this feature.

Once one roams around what now stands and looks at what the eventual final product is expected to look like - a feeling of a Romanesque church is developed. To further enhance its Romanesque qualities one may also mention the great pragmatism (a marked feature of the Romanesque era) adopted throughout the course of the church's erection in the last thirty-eight years. A pragmatism that comes out in bold in the decision to dismantle a continuous balcony all around the church's internal perimeter. In the original design this balcony was to be a prominent feature of the church's interior. In later years this idea was to be scrapped. This led to a laborious process of pulling down this great concrete structure and the number of stone pillars on which it was supported. To be fair, this balcony did serve to facilitate the setting up of formwork on which a great number of masonry jobs were carried out, but one cannot help wonder at what an expense!

The balcony provided further difficulties on how to cover the now naked perimeter hollowed up due to the concrete dismantling. A neat solution was provided in a masonry frieze that now separates the two different styles (on lower levels, half and quarter column, above balcony region it changes into square ribs). When this balcony is completely removed the interior will gain a new dimension, one of greater space and circulation.

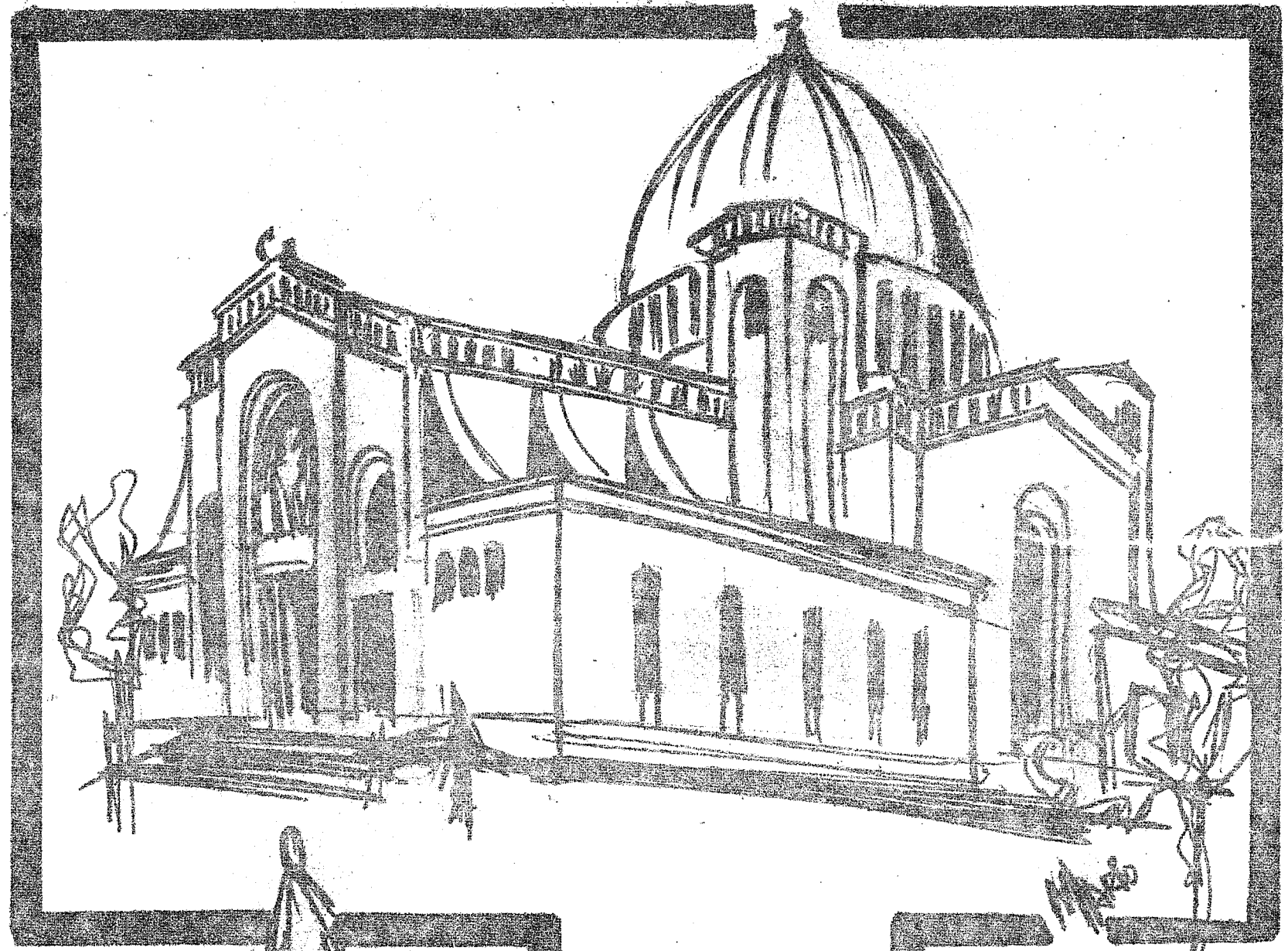
Of considerable interest is the erection of the huge dome that will top the whole edifice. It has been reported that the tender for the dome has been won by a leading local constructional firm for an

incredible £M60,000. Add this to the £M10,600 spent on one ring beam already completed and you are bound to get quite an expensive topping for this church!

The story behind the ring beam itself is worth recalling. In original plans the ring beam was of a circular shape. However, when a change in the Architectural consultants had to be carried out the idea was to change. . . Mainly for improved structural reasons, and also for greater ease of setting up formwork an octagonal shape was suggested. Indeed on plan the ring beam consists of eight sides each 32 feet in length with a height of 32 inches. Nine hundred bags of cement went into its manufacture plus of course considerable amount of steel reinforcement. It was completed in eight days and the procedure was to cast from the centre of a side to the centre of an adjacent one for each day. Over it, work on the actual dome, expected to be of 75 feet internal diameter, will soon start. It was originally planned to have two rows of windows on top of each other, with another ring beam separating these rows. However this was scrapped (further pragmatism) and the present design features a single row of 48 high windows all around the dome's circumference. These windows will be the infill panels for the ribs that will form the basic structure of the dome.

In more recent years one of the major problems evolved was the question of how safe it was to erect such a large dome on the existing supporting base. To put you in the picture one must recall that below the level of the church exists a crypt which presently serves as a temporary alternative to the parish church. Recently the architectural consultants expressed their concern on the possibility of under reinforcement. For this reason the problem was given considerable thought and concrete work being carried out presently, is as a result of these findings. In brief additional reinforced concrete is being introduced in those corners which the consultants declared as "weak" points. This reinforcing process mainly consists of infilling the passages under the four main footings of the dome in the crypt with reinforced concrete. This, apart from the fact that in recent years six foot wide passages in the crypt were reduced to three feet and some were even completely infilled with concrete. These and other interesting cases indicate alarming structural shortcomings in the very original design.

Other structural problems were faced some years ago during the roof construction of the crypt. The matter was of a much more serious nature and this led to an official inquiry plus, of course, the closing up of the church itself. The roofing system adopted for the crypt is quite a feature and this is more so when one considers that it is nearly thirty years of age. A ring beam connected to giant cantilevered beams plus pillars form an aesthetically pleasing design.



MANZO CASSAR.

TALKABOUT -
SAN SEBASTION CHURCH
QORMI - An artistic

What we have presented in our feature remains a brief outline behind the lengthy history of the San Sebastian church of Qormi. A 'history' that we honestly feel can be applied as a yardstick in future ecclesiastical architecture in Malta, (and we are bound to have more of it ..... now that they are winning the BIG prizes!). Here we have a case where pragmatism has been adopted to produce a desireable solution. Where failure and human errors were revealed, a solution was ferreted out and in the majority of cases proved successful. This, in itself, together with all the ups and downs of its thirty-eight years existence must surely fill the people of Qormi (San Sebastian ..... of course!) with great hope and pride in seeing this edifice completed. A site visit would be worth the trip ..... there is much more to it than what we have said ..... to this we give a personal guarantee!

Footnote: Our thanks to the Rev. S. Deguara (Archpriest of San Sebastian, Qormi); Mr. C. Falzon (our guide during our visits) and Fr. K. Mercieca for their help in compiling this feature.

NEXT ISSUE: NEW TOURIST COMPLEX AT GHADIRA

Editor's Note

We are pleased to announce that from the next issue we will be having space available for classified advertisements. If, say, there is some book you want to sell or maybe one you need desperately, some drawing equipment you want to replace or perhaps exchange ..... anything will be considered. Space will be available free for students and staff members of our Department. Rates for 'outsiders' may be obtained on request. If interested, contact any member of the Editorial Board.
