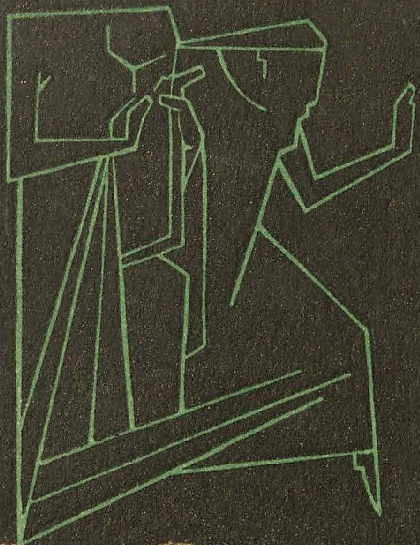


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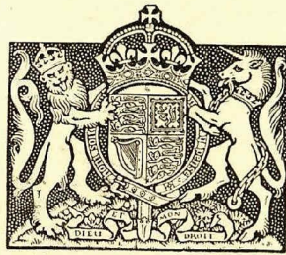


royal
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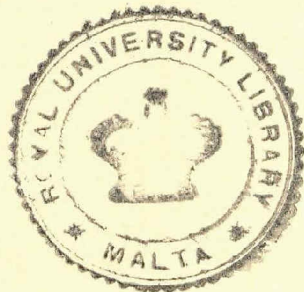


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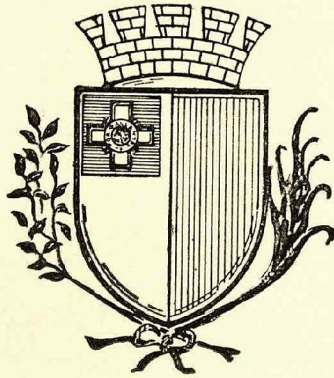
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ROYAL OPERA
HOUSE



EXHIBITION
1954



EXHIBITION
OF DRAWINGS AND MODELS
for the
RECONSTRUCTION
OF THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE



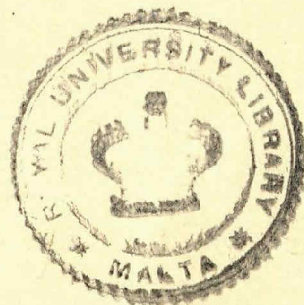
EXHIBITION ORGANISED BY THE
ROYAL OPERA HOUSE RECONSTRUCTION COMMITTEE

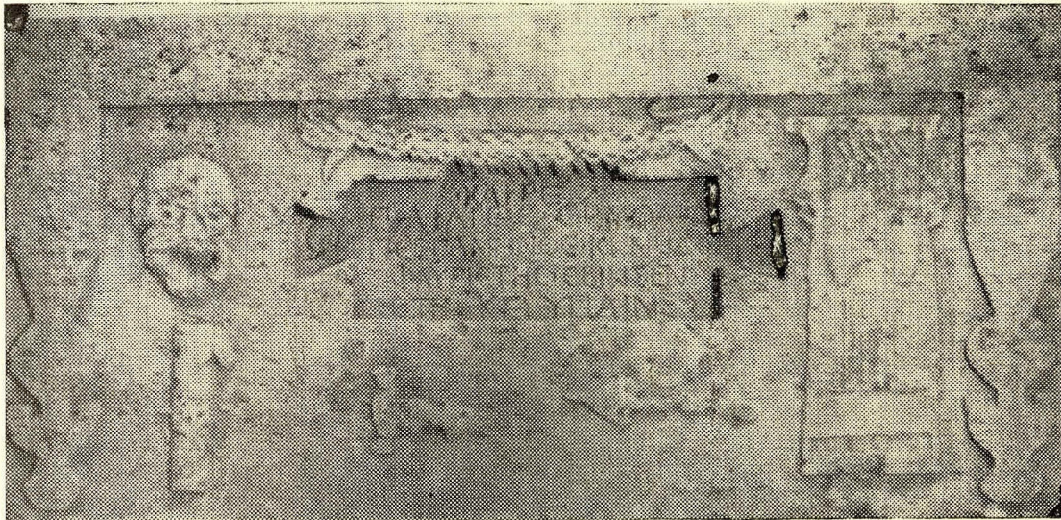
This monograph has been written by Paul J. Naudi, Secretary, Royal Opera House Reconstruction Committee, who gratefully acknowledges the help of the Rev. Brother Leo Barrington, M.A., Principal, St. Michael's Training College; Chev V. Bonello; Dom. Maurus Inguanez, O.S.B., Librarian Royal Malta Library, and Dr. J. Baldacchino, M.D, F.G.S., F.M.R., Director of Museum.

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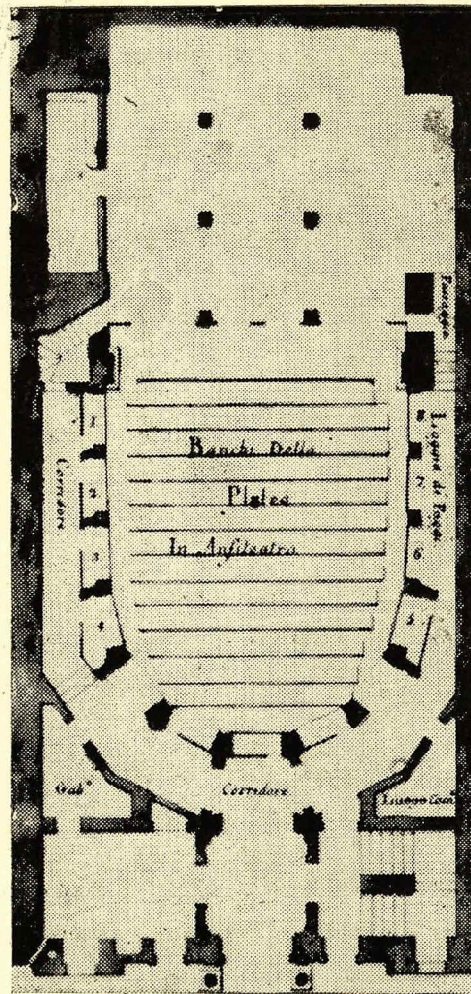




Although the building of the Royal Opera House, formerly known as the New Theatre, on the site of the Auberge d'Angleterre, gave a great impetus to music, the history of the Theatre in Malta did not commence with its erection. An island which experienced the domination of the greatest nations, which through the centuries has been the coveted gem of mighty empires, which has preserved its own civilisation and culture, undoubtedly followed the vicissitudes of one of the finest art forms from its earliest beginnings. Far back in Roman times, the Maltese seem to have had some interest in the Theatre for the grave of one Aelius Hermolaos, a comic actor, has been discovered in the island. The story of Opera in Malta, with its achievements and setbacks may be said to have commenced a little more than a century after the Knights of St. John came to the island.

Italian Opera, accidentally developed by the Florentine Camarata, crossed the frontiers of the peninsula in 1618 and reached London and St Petersburg in the 18th century. By that time the idea of a public theatre for opera, first initiated at the San Cassiano in the Republic of Venice, spread rapidly all over Europe.

Malta, which was then the home of the flower of the nobility of Europe, did not lag behind. Grandmaster Manoel de Vilhena vied with neighbouring princes and in 1730 ordered the construction of a theatre, which now bears his name. This little theatre, typical of eighteenth century Italian Theatres, is considered by connoisseurs to be a real gem of architecture.



Plan of the Manoel Theatre
in the Cabreo della Fondazione
Manoel MS No. 310 Treas. B.
Royal Malta Library.

The love and enthusiasm of the Maltese people for the Opera House was shown in the years that followed. In 1811 a group of public spirited gentlemen carried out extensive works of adaptation in the interior of the Manoel theatre, two boxes in every tier and the balcony were added. In the two years that followed this society lost 24,000 scudi in the impresa. In 1834 the subscribers donated the big crystal lampadario bought at their own expense from Paris and in 1834, again at private expense, further improvements involving the addition of 6 boxes were carried out. And yet during this period all the impresas, with the exception of that of Pietro Combi when the Russians came to Malta after the battle of Navarino, were sustaining substantial losses. These facts and many others are milestones in the progress of the history of the theatre in Malta.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century with the invention of gaslight, there was also a crying need for improved ventilation and sanitation. The influences coming from Torelli "*Il Gran Stregone*" and the Bibienas had reached our shores and out of these new ideas was born the desire for a greater Opera House, better equipped for good stage presentations and capable of meeting the social requirements of an increasing population. "*La popolazione moltiplicata*", writes *il Mediterraneo* in the middle of the 19th century, "*i mutati tempi, le esigenze della civiltà presente sono obbligate contentarsi di un lascito furtivo d'un secolo e mezzo addietro perocchè non si era pensato ancora a dotare queste possessioni, questo tanto visitato centro del Mediterraneo di un decente ed idoneo luogo al più utile dei divertimenti*".

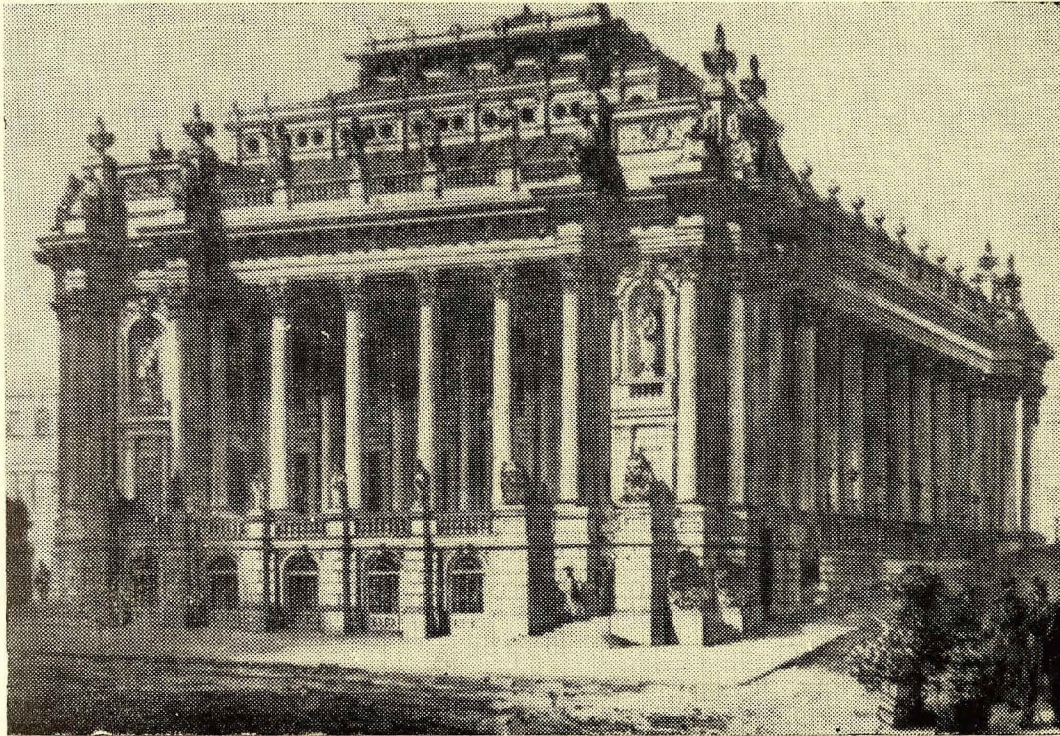
In July, 1860, His Excellency the Governor Lt. Gen. Sir John Gaspard Le Marchant, gave instructions to Sir Adrian Dingli, Crown Advocate, to take preliminary steps for submitting to the Council a motion for the construction of a new Theatre. Although the Royal Opera House was completed in 1866, between the initiation of the building and its completion there are five years of heartrending disappointments, as well as a beginning, full of misunderstandings which nearly ended in failure.

Mr E. M. Barry was entrusted with the preparation of the designs and in December, 1860, Sir Adrian Dingli received plans dated 24th November, 1860, for reference to the Council.

The members of the Council however absolutely declined to give their assent to the new project before receiving an assurance that the Manoel Theatre would be put up for sale or some other form of alienation made, and that the difference between the proceeds from the sale and the entire cost of the new Theatre with the exception only of painting and decoration, stage machinery and other furniture, should not exceed £6,000. "*For that reason alone*" — writes Sir Adrian Dingli to Sir Victor Houlton, Chief Secretary to Government — "*the present Theatre was put up for sale or a perpetual lease at the same time as tenders for the building of a new Theatre were called for; and the only object of that arrangement was to secure, before commencing the new building, a capital which, with a further outlay of no more than £6,000 would be sufficient for the completion of that work.*" On the 23rd January, 1861, two notices calling for tenders were published by the Collector of Land Revenue one for the sale or grant in emphyteusis of the Manoel Theatre (per offerte per l'acquisto del Teatro in vendita o in enfiteusi) and the other for the construction of the new Theatre (per offerte per la costruzione di un Teatro).

The road now seemed to be clear and the sum of £1,000 for the construction of the Royal Opera House was presented in the Third Supplementary Estimate of Expenditure and passed by resolution in Council No. 72 at the Sitting No. 13 of the 20th February, 1861. The narration under the signature of George Barbar, acting Clerk to the Council, reads as follows:

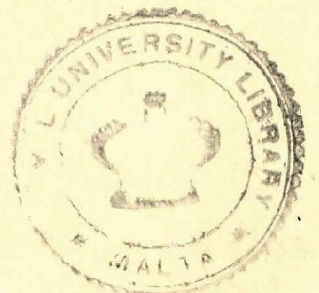
Towards the construction of a New Opera House in Valletta on the site occupied by the building called 'Auberge d'Angleterre', the total cost of construction, exclusive of painting or decoration, stage machinery or other furniture, not exceeding £14,000, i.e. for the construction and iron work, as by tenders received, £13,700,



Design of the New Opera House by Barry published in the "Builder" in 1863.

and to E. Barry., Esq., Architect, for specifications and directions, on his coming to Malta for that purpose, before the commencement of the work, £300.

Meanwhile Mr E. M. Barry was invited to visit Malta and he arrived from Marseilles on the P. & O. "Vectis", on the 3rd March, 1861. On the Island for consultations was also Mr Emmerson of Messrs Emmerson and Co, the firm entrusted with the construction of the interior of the Theatre in iron. A notice published on the 9th March stated that the accommodation of the new Theatre



was to be as follows :

	Boxes
Pit Tier	126
Ground Tier	66
First	126
Second	126
Governor and Artists	32
Pit Stalls	56
Balcony	48
Pit	323
Amphitheatre	192
	—
	1095 sitting
Additional	200 standing
	—
Total	1295

It appears however that when the order for the preparation of the designs was placed with the architect, he was not made aware of the nature of the site, with the result that the project submitted, which was intended for a plane superficies, required modifications on account of the steep incline along South Street and Ordnance Street. The first step taken as soon as the plans were received was to ask the architect to modify it to suit the terrain.

This matter was thoroughly discussed during the stay of Mr Barry on the Island. The architect also visited the site and made a sketch of the front elevation showing how this would look after the necessary alterations had been made. Mr Barry returned to England soon after with instructions to start work on a fresh set of plans which were to incorporate the necessary modifications.

Meanwhile the first faux pas, one of the many which nearly landed the project into disaster, took place. At the beginning of February the Collector of Land Revenue received instructions to take an obligation from Master Mason Francesco Mangion to perform the work for which he had tendered i.e. stone and wood-work, without a formal contract pending explanations from the architect with regard to the alterations he had been asked to make to the plan. On the 12th February, 1861, the Collector took the obligations of Mangion without a saving clause to execute the work according to the specifications which the Collector had signed in proof of acceptance on the 8th of February. Mr Mangion's tender and that of Messrs Emmerson for the iron work were ratified on the 22nd February, 1861, subject to the approval of the Colonial Authorities. The agreement with Mangion was therefore arranged and concluded on the plans and relative specifications of the 24th November.

Towards the end of May, 1861, Mangion was ordered to start demolition works of the Auberge D'Angleterre. On the 18th June, 1861, the new plans of Mr Barry were delivered to Sir Adrian Dingli, by Mr Dale, the Clerk of Works detailed by the architect to execute the works.

These new plans differed from the preceding ones in the addition of frontal and lateral terraces with steps, so as to obtain access to the entrance of the Theatre. The terraces were required because the portico was raised several feet above the level of Kingsway, the ground-floor of the Theatre being on a level with Zachary Street. According to these plans, the terrace in front of the portico was sixteen feet wide and the body of the building was consequently sixteen feet within the line originally contemplated in the project of 24th November, 1860.

The comments of several Members of the Council on these new plans were not very favourable especially regarding the terrace, which, it was considered, created a great wastage of precious space.

Sir Adrian Dingli was charged to communicate these views to Mr E. Barry who after an exchange of correspondence submitted a third design on the 16th August, 1861.

In this design the terraces were suppressed, the portico was brought forward in line with Kingsway, and the floor of the portico was reached by means of an internal staircase. The entrance was made from the base under the portico and the shops under the front terrace were eliminated. For the third time the plan was turned down; this time because it was desired to retain the shops.

Meanwhile on the 6th of September, 1861, works of demolition and excavation for the foundations were completed and the following day the actual building was commenced, or it should be rather stated that the foundation stone for the second disaster was well and truly laid.

The position at the moment was still confused; Council Members continued to voice their objections and to air their views. Mr Dale seems to have seen in this the opportunity to curry favour with the authorities by complaining of Mr Barry and by giving assurances that the Architect could be prevailed upon to meet the desires of the Council Members, as the modifications proposed could easily be carried out without spoiling the beauty of the design.

On the assurances uttered by a man selected by Mr Barry himself to execute the work, permission of His Excellency was obtained to send Mr Dale to England to confer with Mr Barry.

Mr Dale left Malta on the 10th September and returned on the 15th October, with clear instructions to follow faithfully the plans of the 18th June, 1861, which had meanwhile been approved on the 4th October, 1861. The Memorandum giving the assent signed by

H.E. the Governor ends with the following words :-

“Under all these circumstances, the modifications suggested having been found impracticable without a material deviation from the original plans adopted; the Building must be constructed in strict conformity with Mr Barry’s completed plans, of which we are already in possession of the working drawings.”

On the 22nd of October the third faux pas was made. The time for the ratification of the contract of lease of the Manoel Theatre was due to expire on the 5th of November, and the Collector of Land Revenue asked for instructions. The advice given by Sir Adrian Dingli in this instance reads as follows: *“before confirming the lease of the Old House, the Collector should endeavour to secure Mr Mangion’s consent to build the New Theatre, including the necessary woodwork, on the second plan, for a sum not exceeding that fixed by the existing agreement, or for a sum which, after positively ascertaining what reduction could be made in iron work it would be sure that the Government could afford to pay, without violating the compact made with the Council. I need not say that any agreement with Mr Mangion, modifying the existing one, should be made in writing; so that it could, at any time, be offered to the Council for inspection, as was the existing agreement.”*

In spite of this, the contract was ratified in the beginning of November and the Contractor was given a trump card to be used soon after and which, together with other circumstances, led to the suspension of the works for the construction of the Opera House. From this stage onwards all circumstances lead to a climax. The various incidents begin to fuse and to form a clear picture with the action focussed on the contractor Francis Mangion and Mr Dale the Clerk of Works.

Mr Dale was not satisfied with the final recommendations which had received Government sanction on the 4th October, and he showed his disappointment in no uncertain measure. His

importunities, especially with Sir Adrian Dingli and Captain Wilfred Brett, Private Secretary to His Excellency, reached such a stage that at one time Mr Barry writing to the latter stated — “*I think it will be necessary to supersede Mr Dale — but await his reply to a letter I have sent him by this mail — when I get it I will write to you again. The only answer that can be given to the various points named in Dale’s paper is that the Government must have confidence in some one, and must consider whether it should be in their Architect or in a half educated Clerk of Works who has had no experience whatever in theatres.*” Then again on the 2nd November, 1861 “*I am exceedingly sorry to find that there are still so many difficulties and especially that they should be raised in a quarter where they ought to be least expected. In justice to Mr Dale I wait his reply to my letter before coming to a final decision on his case: but if his answer be what I have no doubt it must be, I shall be compelled to insist upon his dismissal as it will be utterly impossible for me to direct the works unless with very different instruments. When Mr Dale worked for me in London, I saw him almost daily and so kept him in check, but at Malta he is out of reach and his head, never very strong, is completely turned. He knows absolutely nothing about theatres and is also ignorant of all architectural considerations. I thought, however, that notwithstanding these drawbacks his ability as a tradesman might be of use, but I never calculated upon his presuming as he has done.*”

Mr Dale’s dismissal came on the 2nd December, 1861, on account of failure to perform his duties and he was for a time superseded by Mr Dunnage, one of the Assistants of Mr Barry, and later by Mr Poulson, another Clerk of Works.

The full reasons for the dismissal were gradually revealed soon after. On the 23rd November, 1861, the Collector of Land Revenue ordered Mr Salvatore Fenech, a Surveyor in his office, to measure the works, for the purpose of effecting another payment to the Contractor. Mr Fenech informed the Collector that the work

was of bad quality. He later confirmed this in a report wherein he recommended *at least* the partial demolition of the work done. On the 10th December works on the new Theatre were suspended pending further investigations. A board appointed for the purpose ended its report dated 18th March, 1862, as follows :-

“Consequently, we are of opinion that serious injury might be sustained by continuing to build upon the present foundations, and we accordingly condemn the whole of the works at present erected, and suggest that they should be entirely demolished, and that the foundations laid with all the care and accuracy, which are required by the science of architecture.”

Meanwhile negotiations with the contractor to undertake the works on the plan of the 18th June (his original obligation had been made on the plan of the 24th November, 1860), broke down on account of certain deductions requested by Government on the new amount quoted. Mr Mangion was fully aware that Government was now without a theatre and he seems to have made full use of this opportunity. It is strange to note that the Government of the day instead of counter-acting by quoting that the works were of a bad quality and required demolition, simply paid Mr Mangion the sum of £884 and the original agreement was dissolved on the 26th December, 1861.

Mr Fenech, now entrusted with the Superintendence of the works, began to suspect that the construction so far made was not only of a bad quality, but that considerable deviation had been made from the plan of the 18th June submitted by Mr Barry. As a matter of fact, the portion of the cellarage which had been constructed was executed without a plan of the floor, as the plans of Mr Barry contemplated the building from the level of Kingsway upwards and he had therefore not catered for any cellarage. Mr Fenech submitted his full report on this point on the 13th February, 1862, wherein he stated that the deviations consisted in the internal longitudinal walls, parallel to South Street and Victory Street, being laid further from the centre of the



building than was indicated on the plans; in the first four transversal walls parallel to Kingsway; and in the bases of the lateral pillars, not being built according to plan.

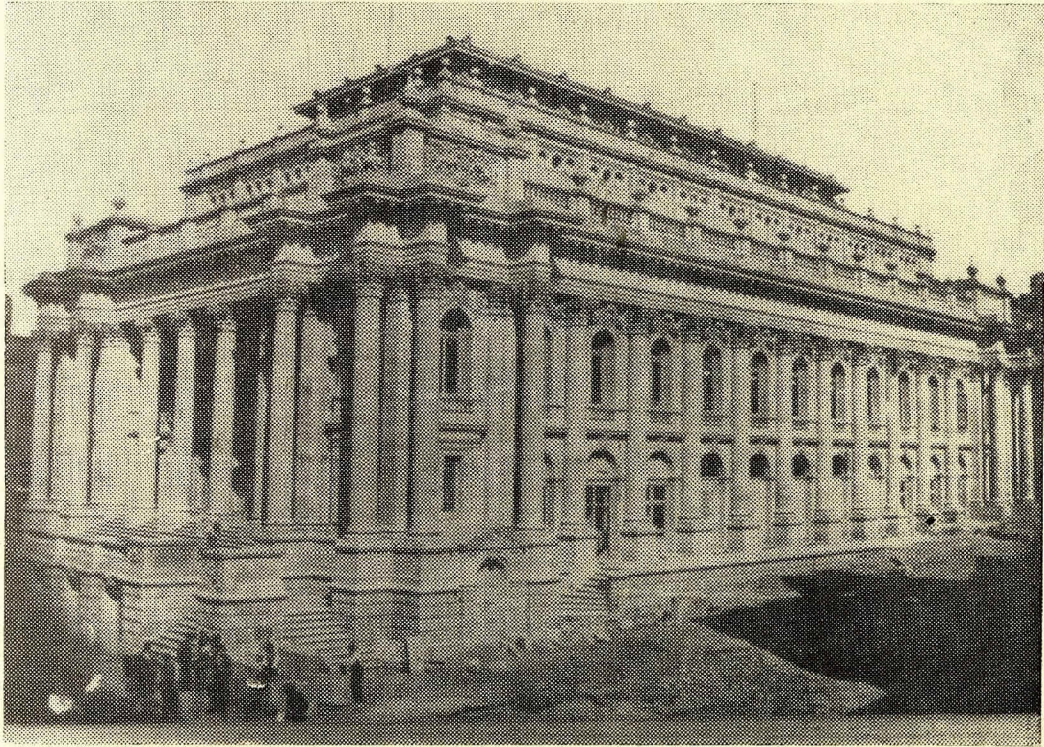
The ratification of the lease of the Old Theatre before the conclusion of the negotiations with the contractor to change his obligation to the new plans; the indemnity paid to Mr Mangion, when all the work done was faulty; and finally the discovery that the plans of Mr Barry had been ignored; created considerable disappointment and consternation amongst the population. The Sittings of the Council of Government of the 22nd January and of the 29th January, 1862, were the scenes of many heated debates; the Press loudly condemned the attitude of the Government, and there was a strong feeling to address a petition or to send a delegation to Her Majesty in order to ask, at least, for a parity of elected Members with Government Members.

The following is an extract from comments of the paper of the day:-

“La seduta fu feconda di discussioni animatissime, ed atte ad indurre sempre più nella popolazione il profondo convincimento che questa larva di popolare rappresentanza non giova ad altro, se non a che il governo si valga a giustificare i suoi atti col lenocinio del parere e consenso del Consiglio. Noi abbiamo sempre mai dato carico dei nostri malanni al governo locale — siamo però giusti — il governo della metropoli non è scevro di colpa. Imperciocchè domandiamo noi — a qual prò concederci questa rappresentanza ermafrodita? O noi siam maturi alle libere istituzioni, o non siamo. Se lo siamo, perchè darcele a metà e barcollanti sui trampoli?”

The Council of Government at the Sitting of the 15th April, 1862, appointed a Select Committee to investigate the matter. The sittings held were long and numerous, the report was detailed and elaborate, the findings interesting but inconclusive and the loss sustained was estimated at £1,432.

The construction of the Theatre was resumed in mid March, 1862, by another Contractor, Mr Michael Angelo Azzopardi who undertook to demolish and reconstruct the work badly executed for £727 and complete the stone work of the building for a sum of £6,200.

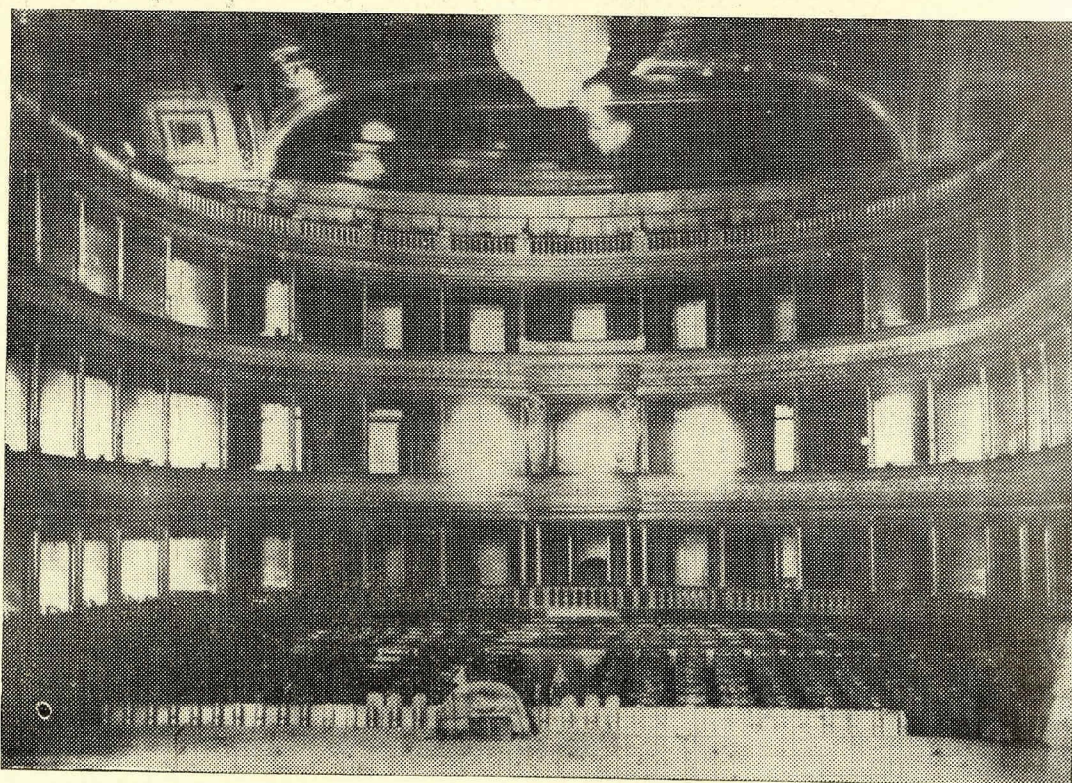


Exterior of the Royal Opera House, 1866.

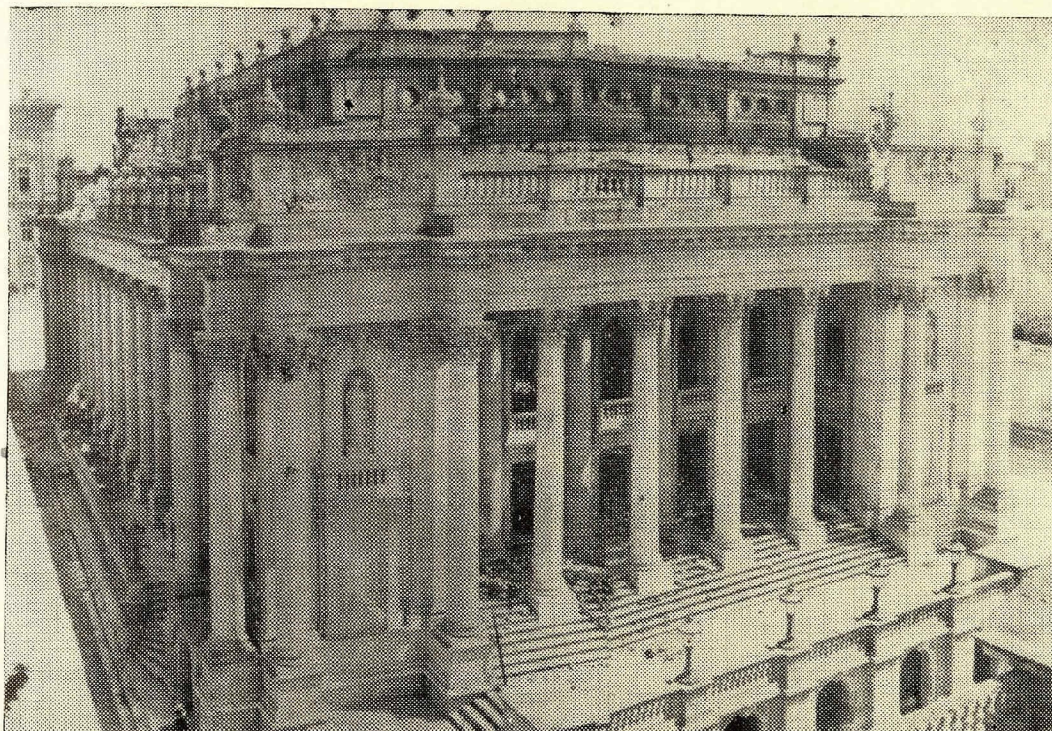
The storm of criticism slowly abated, the works proceeded with gathering momentum and the project was gradually steered towards completion until on the 3rd March, 1865, a Select Committee of the Council of Government composed of Sir Victor Houlton, Mr Vella, Dr Sciortino, Mr Muscat and Dr Briffa was entrusted to report on the best way by which the final works should be carried out.

The richly decorated stonework of the exterior with the exception of 16 statues and of some balustrades was completed and the Commission therefore felt that when the external decorations of a building were of such a costly and highly ornamental character, all the minor details of internal works had to be of a nature to sustain the character of the external ornamentation, so that a symmetrical and uniform character could be maintained and pervade the whole structure.

The Committee was against a belated and unwise economy and in the exhaustive recommendations as regards woodwork, decorations and furniture, marble and iron works, illumination and stage machinery they strongly emphasised the fact that every item should be in harmony with the magnificence of the exterior.



Interior of the Royal Opera House, 1866.



Photograph of the Exterior of the Royal Opera House taken soon after it was damaged by fire in 1873.

The remaining stonework was entrusted to Mr M. A. Azzopardi the Contractor who had built the theatre; the stage and stage machinery was given to Messrs Luigi Frendo and Achille Amato, Gas installation was entrusted to the Gas Company, the marble busts were to be obtained from Italy and all remaining works were given by contract to Messrs Emmerson and Murgatroyd.

The period prior to the opening of the Theatre was uneventful with the exception of the appointment in April of another Select Committee to deal with certain claims by Contractors for extra works and by Mr Barry for payment of fees and travelling expenses. There was also another small squall in the Sitting of the Council of Government of the 26th February when a money Vote was presented for the lowering of Kingsway to the

level of the Theatre and for the insurance of the Theatre against fire. However the Theatre was not insured after all.

The Notice calling for tenders for the first impresa of the Royal Opera House — "*Impresa del Real Teatro di Malta*" — was published by the Commissioner of Land Revenue on the 28th March, 1866, and the Theatre which finally cost approximately £41,000 was inaugurated on the 9th October, 1866, with "*I Puritani*."



On the 25th May, 1873, the interior and a part of the exterior were destroyed by fire. During the general rehearsal of the New Opera "La Vergine del Castello" of Mro. Privitera, who had been invited to Malta to direct it in person, part of the paper scenery caught fire, and in a few minutes the stage was one mass of flames which started to spread towards the pit and the balconies. The musicians and others who were in the auditorium escaped with their lives but some of them suffered severe injuries. Soon the whole interior became a furnace of burning woodwork and twisted beams of iron, the roof collapsed and the darkness of the night was broken by the sudden rise of a mass of flames towards the sky.

His Excellency the Governor, Sir Charles Van Straubenzee was immediately on the scene of the disaster together with Service Chiefs and Government Officials and he personally directed operations to control the fire and especially to check the flames from reaching the gunpowder store in close proximity to St. James Cavalier. All the manpower that could be mustered was brought, together with all the available fire fighting equipment, on the scene of conflagration. All officers and men of the Royal Engineers, the Royal Artillery, the Royal Malta Fencible Artillery and of the 71st and 28th Regiments joined with sailors of the British and Austrian Navies, who happened to be in harbour, to bring the fire under control.

The streets in Valletta presented a weird sight with people fleeing out of the city carrying terrified children in their arms, whilst men fought the flames which threatened at every moment on account of the intense heat to explode the gunpowder store and thus bury hundreds of people under the massive stones of a building which had become the pride of the Maltese.

From a distance Valletta presented an awe-inspiring spectacle — "*La Valletta* — reports the press of the day — *si vedeva tutta fuoco ed illuminata dalle fiamme come se fosse il sole a pien meriggio. Dalle tre città poi e dalla campagna si credeva che la Valletta fosse tutta un incendio*".



Interior of the Royal Opera House after it was destroyed by fire in 1873.

The fire which had started towards 9.30 p.m. began to abate towards 2 a.m. The whole interior was one mass of rubble and twisted iron. A part of the exterior had collapsed and some of the architecture was ruined by fire.

Many musicians lost their instruments amongst them Signora Marra who lost a harp valued at 2,000 francs; the impresa suffered heavily through the complete loss of costumes, scenery and properties; but the greatest loss was sustained by the Maltese people who in a few moments saw the destruction of a magnificent edifice which had cost them years of assiduous labour and immense sacrifices to erect.

On the 20th May, 1873, three days after the theatre was burned down the Council of Government appointed a Select

Committee to report whether the Royal Opera House should be reconstructed and if in the affirmative to prepare an estimate of costs. The Committee did not lose much time. The first Sitting was held on the following day and the first decision reached, with one abstention, was that the theatre should be rebuilt at Government expense.

The report circulated to Members of the House on the 24th September was very comprehensive and elaborate. The 33 paragraphs and 10 appendices are very illuminating and a clear indication that the study was taken very seriously.

The report opens as follows :-

E' quasi superfluo il dire che un teatro in Malta sia cosa di grande rilevanza. Prescindendo dalla circostanza che in Malta vi ha un teatro da oltre un secolo, e che il pubblico, avvezzo a quella specie di ricreazione, ne soffrirebbe con dispiacere la perdita — un teatro ben condotto, tende ad incivilire le menti ed i costumi del popolo; offre un onesto divertimento, atto a richiamare molti che altrimenti si darebbero a divertimenti disonesti; incoraggisce la coltura di un' arte nobile, e porge mezzi di sussistenza ad un numero considerevole di persone.

The Committee then proceeded to condemn with sound arguments a proposal that the Theatre should pass to private ownership and that the rebuilding should be done at private enterprise. Further proposals that the Theatre should be completely demolished and erected on the site of the "Palazzo Ferreria" and that the position of the stage and the terrace over Kingsway should be inverted, were also turned down after due consideration.

The Committee finally considered the enlargement of the stage and the materials to be used in the reconstruction in order to eliminate, as far as possible, the risk of fire. In this respect the Committee was faced with the problem of acoustics, and advice on this question was sought from Captain Davies, and Professor Schinas. These two gentlemen submitted two reports which, whilst agreeing in some matters, presented different solutions and

divergent opinions on major points and the Committee therefore recommended that before embarking on the project of reconstruction, Government should consult specialists. Prof. Tyndall and Prof. Cantoni were suggested. The cost of reconstruction was estimated at £20,722. The report was signed by Sir A. Dingli, R.C. Legh, E.B. Trapani, Emle Scicluna, S. Cachia Zammit, R. Barbaro, H. Zimelli.

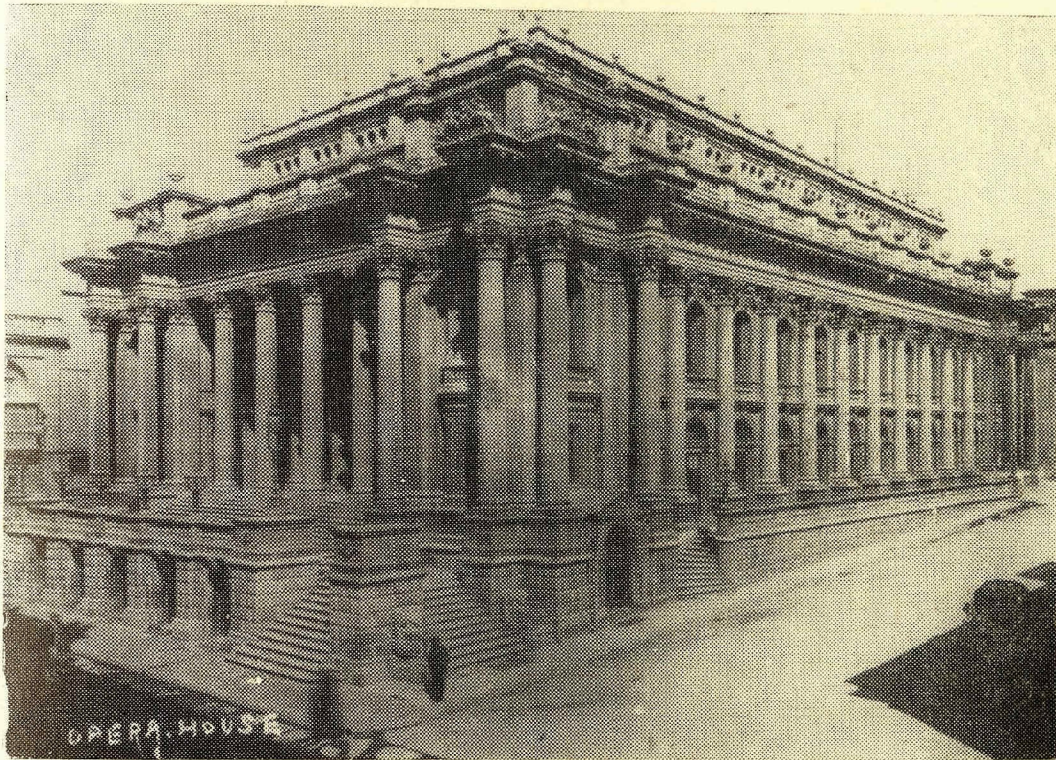
On the 4th December, 1873, Sir Victor Houlton, Principal Secretary to Government, moved that the Royal Opera House be reconstructed out of public funds. The speech he delivered on that occasion deserves to be mentioned as it was both memorable and edifying. The conclusion is worthy of repetition:

Quale l'uomo, possedente una particella di nobile sentimento — che passando presso il teatro, non piange amaramente i danni sofferti dal bel edifizio: No! signori, al sogghigno è succeduto il dispiacere — tanto è vera la sentenza del nostro più grande poeta:

*That what we have, we prize not to the worth
Whiles we enjoy it, but being lack'd and lost,
Why, then we rack the value, then we find
The virtue that possession would not show us
Whiles it was ours.*

How very true, how very real are these words after all that the present generation has gone through, how well can they be applied to the present times. The resolution proposed by Sir V. Houlton and amended by the Hon. H. Zimelli was unanimously approved at the Sitting of the 26th December, 1873.

The first estimate of £8,550 for reconstruction was presented to the Council of Government on the 19th May, 1875, and after several heated debates in which some members opposed the reconstruction on the plea that works of major importance such as the

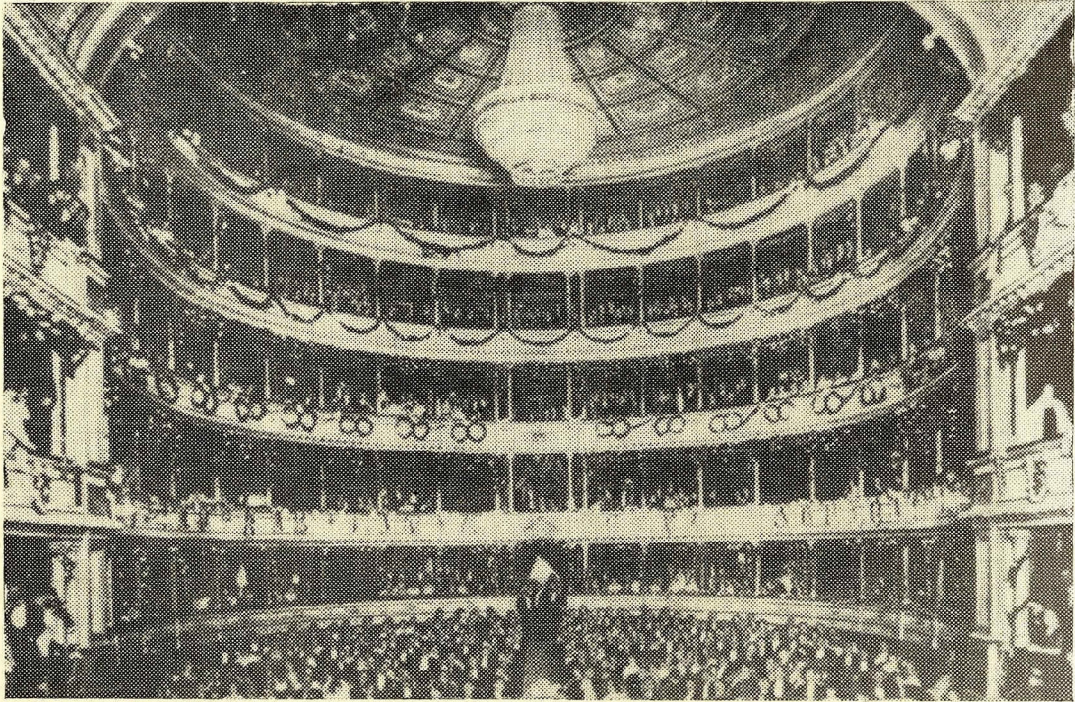


The Exterior of the Royal Opera House as reconstructed in 1877.

illumination of Sliema, Pietà and St. Julians by means of kerosene lamps, should take priority, the vote was finally approved on the 28th May with one member voting against, one abstention and one absence.

The stone-work was entrusted to the contractor who had originally built the Theatre, Mr M. A. Azzopardi, and the direction of the works was entrusted to Mr Poulson. This time there were no misunderstandings, the reconstruction proceeded steadily and by the middle of 1877 the work was nearing completion. On the 7th of March the Principal Secretary to Government presented an estimate for completing the decorations of the Theatre and for acquiring the curtain, the scenery and other properties.

At the beginning of June Chev. Zimelli, who was granted the impresa after a call for tenders published on the 15th May, 1877,



The interior of the Royal Opera House before its demolition by aerial attack in World War II.

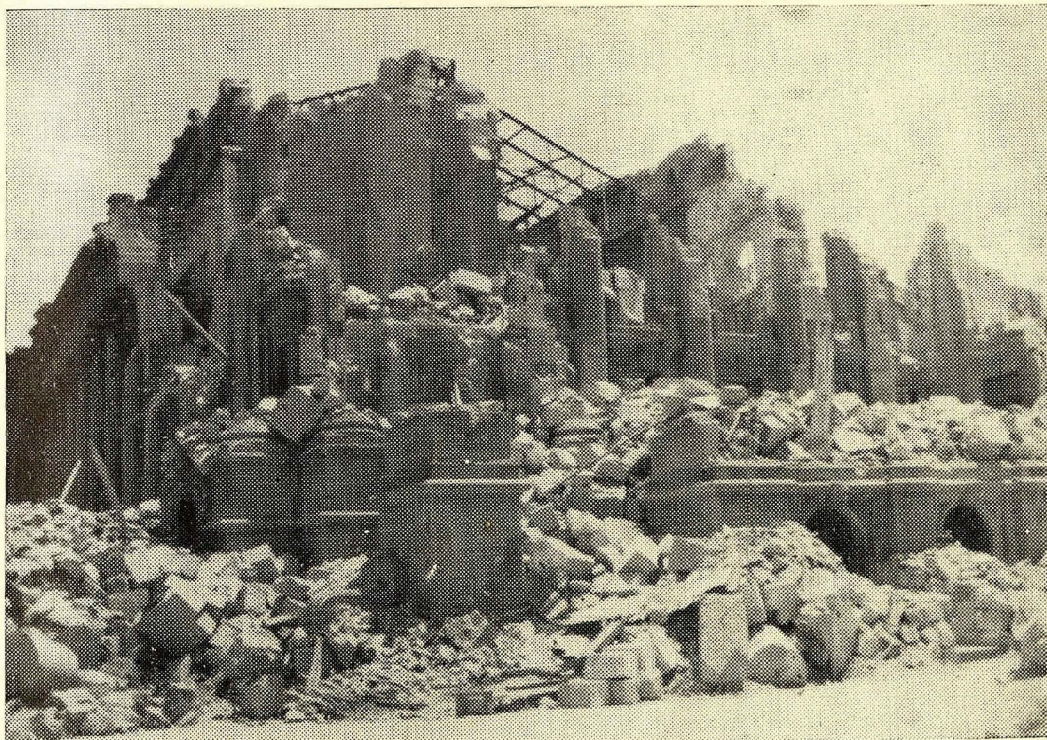
proceeded to Italy to form the Opera Company. Meanwhile Baron N. Testaferrata Abela, the Hon. Dr A. Naudi and Mr Hoare were appointed by Government as the first — Giunta Teatrale —.

The interior decorations and the final works were completed in September and the gas illumination was tested at the end of the month. The description of an eyewitness states "*La prova riuscì magnifica. L'aspetto generale che si compone di cinque ordini ognuno di 23 palchi e di una elegante platea, è bellissimo e poco differenza nel complesso da quel che era prima dell'incendio.*"

The Royal Opera House, once more standing erect in all its splendour and magnificence was inaugurated on the 11th October, 1877, with the Opera "Aida" by Giuseppe Verdi under the direction of Mro Cav. Sabatelli.

What remains is recent history. It is however well to follow the old adage and to report the vicissitudes of the Opera House in recent times for the sake of future generations. The memory of man is too short and certain facts, unless recorded at the time when they occur, when they figure in the pages of history, are not always given the right colouring or prominence which they really deserve.

In 1942 the German Luftwaffe under the Command of Marshal Kesselring from its base in Sicily started its pitiless and haphazard hammering of the Maltese Islands. On the 7th of April, 1942, in an air raid which lasted several hours and which was carried out by hundreds of planes, the Royal Opera House was reduced to a heap of rubble. This was one of the greatest blows ever suffered by the Maltese Nation.



The Royal Opera House reduced to a heap of rubble by the German Luftwaffe on the 7th April 1942.

In those days of endless agony when everything seemed to have lost its value, when life and time seemed to have lost their purpose, the loss of homes and property were taken with stolid indifference. Yet many were those whose eyes filled with tears at the sight of the smashed remains of what was once a centre of culture, a landmark of our progress and civilization.

For more than ten years the Theatre has lain in ruins, a shadow of past glories, a relic of innumerable sufferings while works of major importance to the daily life of the nation were being speedily undertaken. But the time is now fast approaching when this wound, like countless others, will be healed.

In 1953 a Committee was appointed by Government to make recommendations regarding the rebuilding of the Royal Opera House. The terms of reference given to it were very wide but may be summarised under these headings. First the Selection of the Site, second the Selection of the Architect and third the giving of advice while the building is in progress. In brief the functions of the Committee will come to a close at the first strains of the Orchestra when the curtain rises for the first time, in the new Opera House.

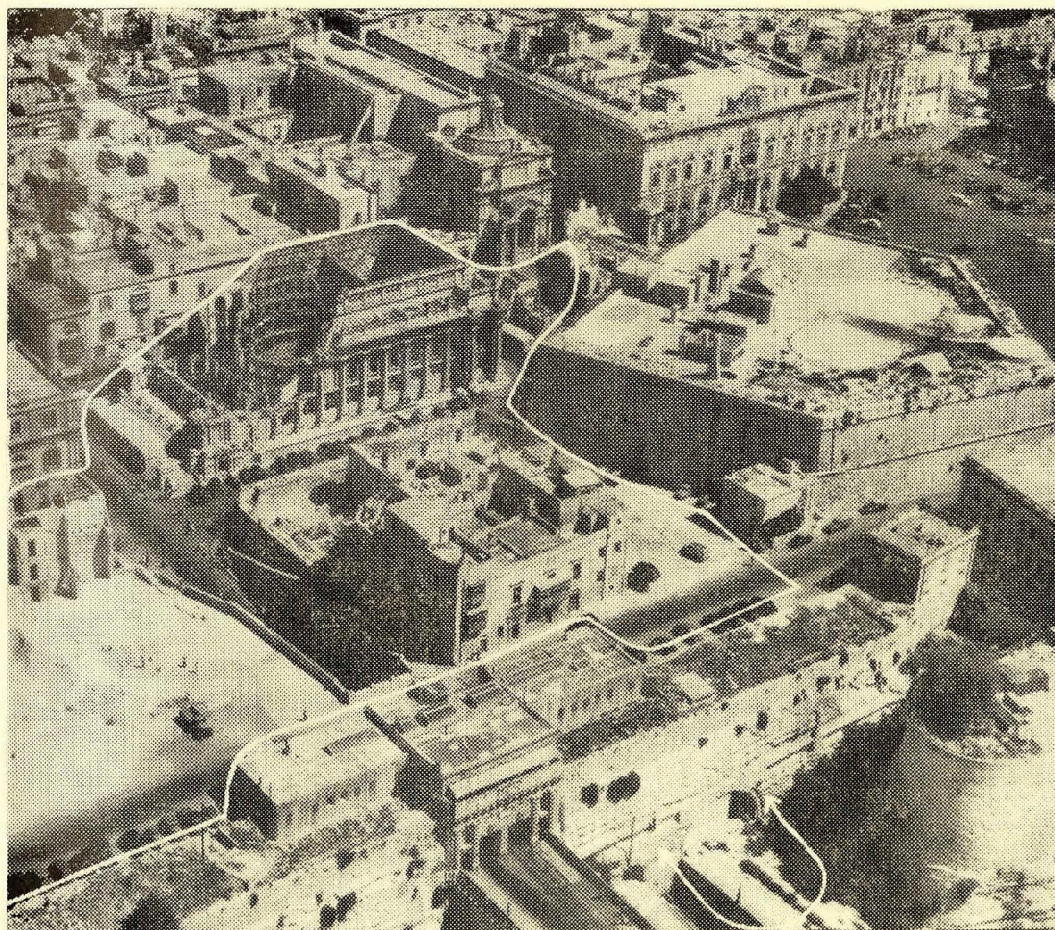
The task entrusted to the Committee is not an easy one but all members have voluntarily shouldered the responsibility with zeal and perseverance.

After careful study it was decided that as the Royal Opera House had become a landmark in Valletta, the new theatre should therefore rise from its battlescars on the old foundations to its pristine grandeur.

Once this decision was taken the Committee proceeded to prepare the Schedule of Accommodation taking into consideration past defects, the theatre approaches and modern requirements.

Finally, after consultation with the proper authorities abroad, Government, on the advice of the Committee, invited six architects of world repute to submit designs for the rebuilding of the Royal Opera House.

The architects selected have not failed to feel the importance of the occasion and have grouped around them the best specialists in the art of theatre building so that our Opera House will, on completion, emulate the massive fortifications and the beautiful historic buildings in magnificence and grandeur.



The Area affected by the reconstruction of the Royal Opera House.

In 1877 the inauguration of the Theatre was graced by the presence of H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh under a reigning Queen. After nearly eighty years it seems that the wheel has turned full circle. In 1873 the theatre was destroyed by fire. In the Second World War it was razed by aerial attack in the cause of freedom and justice. The sorrow at the sight of the Theatre consumed by flames echoes the anguish of yesterday at the sight of a heap of ruins. Today there is a reigning Queen and her Consort, the Duke of Edinburgh. Perhaps fate will find its real starting point in the inauguration of the new Royal Opera House.





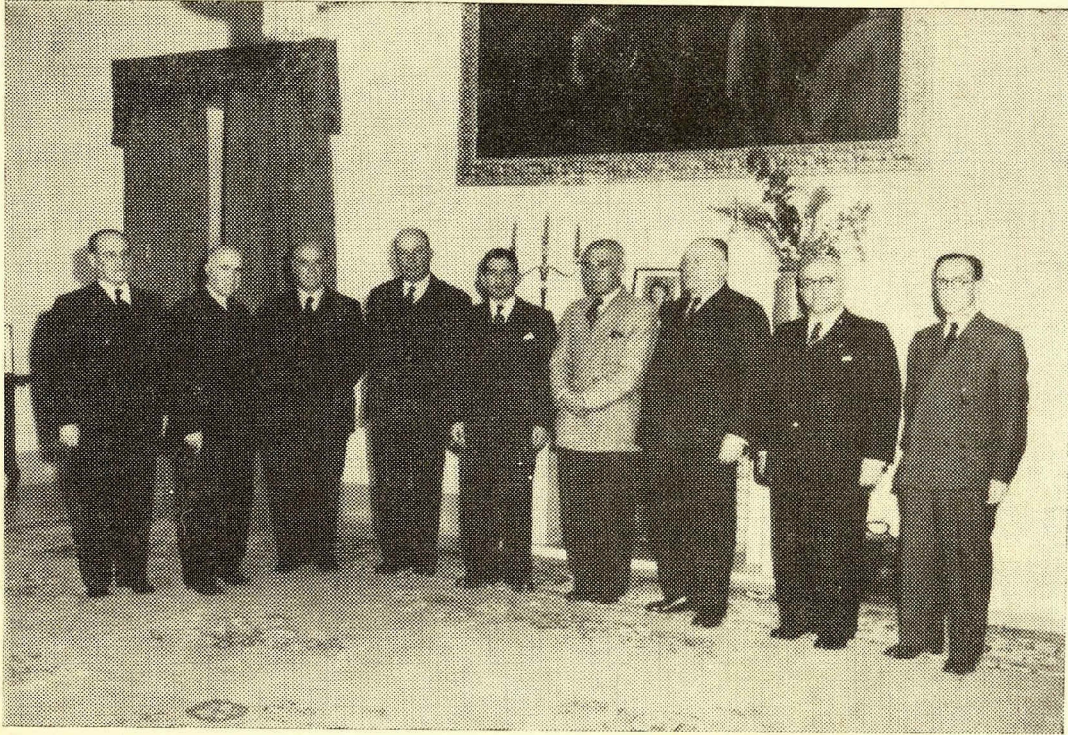
Edward M. Barry.

Barry, Edward, Middleton — (1830 - 1880) Architect. Third son of Sir Charles Barry, R.A., was born in London. Educated at King's College and the Royal Academy of which he became an associate in 1861.

In 1860 on the death of Sir Charles Barry on him devolved the duty of completing his father's works. Foremost of these the new Palace at Westminster. In 1869 was elected academician and in 1873 was elected professor of architecture at the Royal Academy. Simplicity, love of truth and justice and great amiability and kindness distinguished him in private life.

Barry devoted himself exclusively to no style though he handled all with success.

His works include: Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden; Floral Hall, Covent Garden; Royal Opera House, Malta; Charing Cross Hotel; New Palace, Westminster; New Picture Galleries, National Gallery .



Left to Right: **Mr L. V. Farrugia, Chev. V. Bonello, Mr M. Borg Costanzi, Capt. A. Zammit Cutajar, The Hon. the Prime Minister and Minister of Works and Reconstruction, Mr C. Micallef, Mr L. Agius, Mro G. Camilleri, Mr P. J. Naudi.**

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE RECONSTRUCTION COMMITTEE

The Hon. Dr. G. Borg Olivier, LL.D., Prime Minister and Minister of Works and Reconstruction, *Chairman.*

Members

Mr C. Micallef, O.B.E., B.E. & A., A. & C.E., Director of Public Works,

Mr L. Agius, M.B.E., A. & C.E., representative of the Chamber of Architects,

Chev. V. Bonello,

Mr M. Borg Costanzi, A. & C.E.,

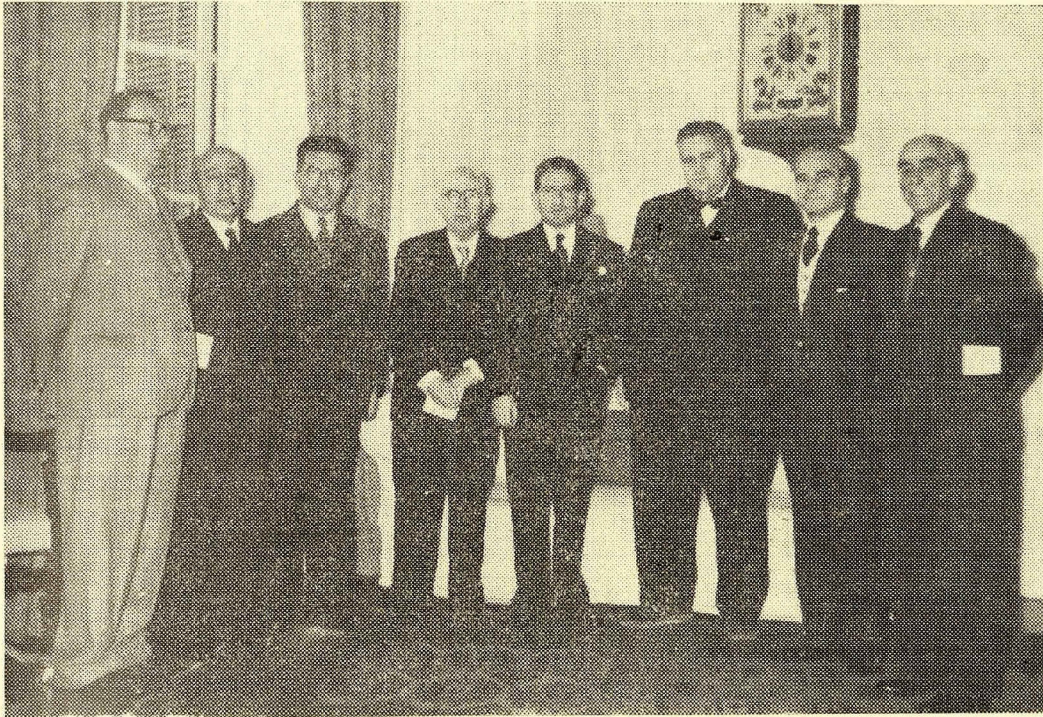
Maestro G. Camilleri,

Mr L. V. Farrugia, O.B.E., B.E. & A., A. & C.E.,

Capt. A. Zammit Cutajar,

Mr Paul J. Naudi, also acting as *Secretary.*

Note:- Mr L. Agius, M.B.E., A. & C.E. resigned on the 21st December, 1953.



Left to Right: The Hon. Mr J. J. Cole, The Hon. Dr G. Felice, The Hon. Dr C. Caruana, The Hon. Dr P. Boffa, The Hon. Dr G. Borg Olivier, The Hon. Dr J. Frenzo Azopardi, The Hon. Dr T. Caruana Demajo, The Hon. Dr A. Paris.

COALITION GOVERNMENT 1954

The Honourable G. Borg Olivier, LL.D., M.L.A., *Prime Minister and Minister of Works and Reconstruction.*

The Honourable P. Boffa, O.B.E., M.D., M.L.A., *Minister of Health and Social Services.*

The Honourable J. Frenzo Azopardi, LL.D., M.L.A., *Minister of Finance.*

The Honourable C. Caruana, B.A., LL.D., M.L.A., *Minister of Posts and Agriculture.*

The Honourable T. Caruana Demajo, LL.D., M.L.A., *Minister of Industry and Commerce.*

The Honourable A. Paris, M.D., M.L.A., *Minister of Education.*

The Honourable J. J. Cole, M.L.A., *Minister of Emigration and Labour.*

The Honourable G. Felice, LL.D., M.L.A., *Minister of Justice.*

SECTION A.

Project presented by

Prof. Erich Boltenstern, Dipl. Ing. Architect.

With the collaboration of:-

Dipl. Ing. Sepp. Stein —	Architectural associates
Dipl. Ing. Peter Lehner	”
Dipl. Arch. Karl Merwar	”
Dipl. Ing. Erna Beck	”
Dipl. Arch. Monika Euler	”
Dipl. Ing. Roinund Schediwy	”

Hofrat Ferdinand Jaschke — since 1922 Technical Director,
Vienna State Opera, Stage installations Consultant.

Alben Rotter — Chief Lighting Engineer, Vienna State Opera,
Stage Lighting consultant.

Dipl. Ing. Dr. techn. Fritz Pfeffer — Statics consultant.

Prof. Dr. Gustav Adolf Schwager — Acoustics consultant.

J. L. Bacon Ges. m.b.h. — Heating and Air Conditioning
Consultant.

Siemens & Halske A. G. — Electric Installations.



Erich Boltensstern.

Prof. Erich Boltensstern, Dipl. Ing. Architect studied architecture at the Technical High School in Vienna.

After gaining experience in various offices in Vienna, Berlin and Barcellona became assistant to Prof. Oscar Strnad at the Vienna "Kunstgewerbeschule". In 1934 was appointed professor of architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna; in 1946 was appointed professor for housing problems at the Vienna Technical High School.

In open contests he was awarded first prize for a Theatre in Olmütz and a Theatre in Brünner. In 1947 after a limited contest was entrusted with the planning and reconstruction of the Auditorium, the Staircases, cloak rooms and lobbies of the State Opera Vienna.

Has large general practices in Austria including big housing projects, industrial buildings, offices, banks and the reconstruction of palaces.

SECTION B

Project submitted by:

Mr Alister MacDonald, F.R.I.B.A., with the collaboration
and advice of

E. H. Jamilly, Dip. Arch., A.R.I.B.A. Architectural Associates

Geoffrey Wilson, F.R.I.B.A. ”

G. H. Gatley, M.A., A.R.I.B.A., ”

Iorys Hughs, M. Eng., M.I.C.E., M.I.Struct.E. —
Structural Eng. Consultant.

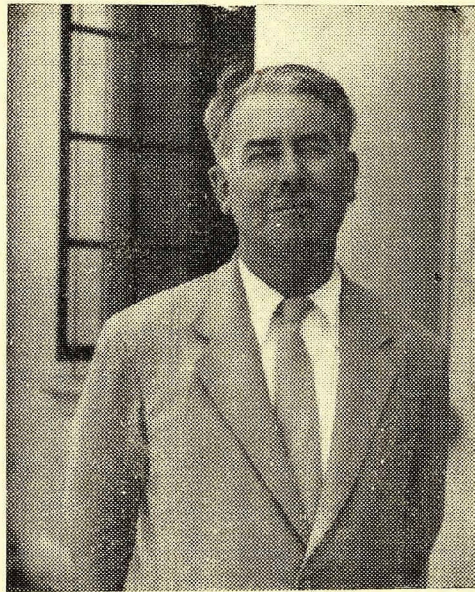
The Director and Staff — Building Research Station (Depart-
ment of Scientific & Industrial Research).

The Administration — The Royal Opera House, Covent
Garden; The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane; Glydnebourne Opera
House; Sadlers Wells Theatre; Stratford-on-Avon *Memorial
Theatre*; The Arts Council of Great Britain.

The Strand Electric & Engineering Co. Ltd.,

Hall Manufacturing Co. Ltd.

Young, Austin and Young Ltd.



Alister MacDonald.

Alister MacDonald, F.R.I.B.A., Chartered Architect,

Member of Science Committee, Royal Institute of British Architects; Chairman, International Building Research Congress, London 1951. Consultant architect to buildings in France and Italy. Member of Planning Commission, Milan 1935.

Consultant planner to War Office. Designed Cantonment in Cyprus involving zoning and planning of large areas. Designed suburb to Nicosia, virgin site for 5 to 6 thousand people.

Consultant planner and architect to Shell Oil Group in Egypt and the Far East.

In private practice on own account since 1925. Designed most types of buildings, commercial, scientific and entertainment, including many cinematograph theatres such as the Victoria Station News Theatre; the reconstruction of the old Theatre Royal in Dumfries, Scotland; the reconstruction and modernization scheme for one of the West End Theatres in London and a new teaching stage and auditorium for the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, London, the foundation stone of which was laid by H.M. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

SECTION C

Project submitted by:

Mr Richard S. Nickson, M.A., F.R.I.B.A., A.A.Dip., in
association with:-

Professor Sir Leslie Patrick Abercombie, D.Lit., Hon. LL.D.,
F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., M.T.P.I., English and American Gold
Medallist, Planner of London and of many English Cities —
Town Planning Consultant.

Hope Bagenal, D.C.M., F.R.I.B.A., Hunt Bursar — Consultant to
Royal Festival Hall, Albert Hall and many other buildings —
Acoustics Consultant.

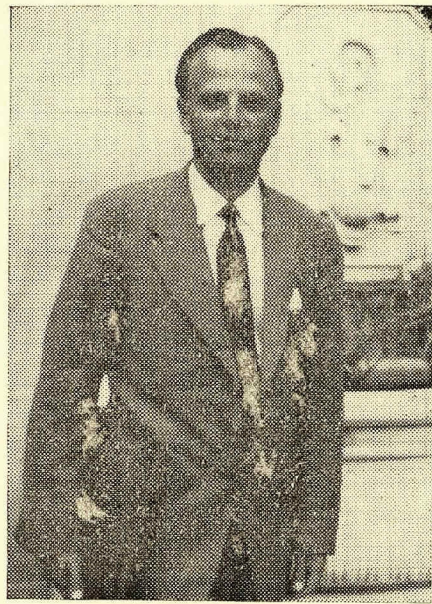
Professor Karl Ebert, Director, Berlin State Opera, Director
Glyndebourne Opera, Professor of Drama, Los Angeles
University — Stage and Operatic Production Consultant.

Derrick and Norah Rigby Childs, A.R.I.B.A., F.R.I.B.A. —
Architectural Associates.

Henry Elder, M.B.E., F.R.I.B.A., — Stage and Layout Consultant
and Architectural Associate.

Philip E. Bell, A.R.I.B.A., — Chief Staff Architect
Ove Arup, C.B.E., M.Inst.Struct.E., — Structural Engineering
Consultant

Henry Goddard, D.S.O., D.F.C., A.F.C., A.R.I.B.A., — Heating
and Air Conditioning Consultant.



Richard Nickson.

Richard S. Nickson, Architect, M.A., F.R.I.B.A., A.A.Dip., Town Planner.

Trained in Lausanne University, Switzerland Bristol and Cambridge Universities, Architectural Association, London.

M. A. and 1st Class in Architecture, Cambridge University. Diploma Architectural Association, London.

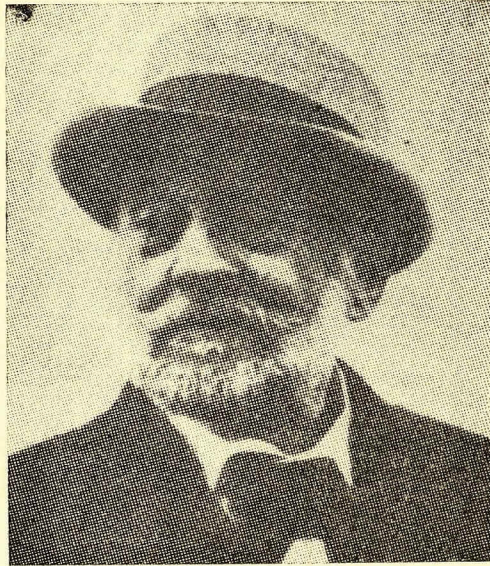
Large general practices in United Kingdom and overseas, two offices in West Africa, in partnership with Z. Borys, A.M.T.P.I., Eng. Arch. in Lagos and Accra — works include two new cathedrals, banks, school assembly and concert halls, theatre, hospital, domestic and industrial buildings.

Written articles on Town Planning, Decoration, etc., Special study of buildings with acoustic and musical problems, in conjunction with Hope Bagenal, F.R.I.B.A., Town Planning and Civic Design works in partnership with Sir Leslie Patrick Abercrombie, D.Lit., Hon. LL.D., F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., M.T.P.I., Consultant Architect to Sierra Leone Development Company Ltd. and to Barclays Bank (D.C. & O.) Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

SECTION D.

Project presented by:

Auguste Perret with the collaboration of:
Roger Gallois Montbrun and the Firm Perret Freres



Auguste Perret

Auguste Perret, who passed away on the 25th February, 1954 in his eightieth year, was a "grand officier de la Legion d'Honneur" since the 1st December, 1949.

In the last ten years, Auguste Perret was awarded several official honours. In France, the Institute opened its doors to him; the Order of Architects elected him the President of the Upper Council; the Circle of Architectural Studies offered him the title of President Founder. Auguste Perret received the "Royal Gold Medal", an exceptional distinction, by the late King George VI and which for architects represents an honour comparable to that of the "Nobel Prize". He was also awarded the gold medal of the American Institute of Architects (A.I.A.); was made a doctor (honoris causa) of the Universities of Helsinki (Finland) and of Princeton (U.S.A.).

In the first years of the twentieth century, Auguste Perret helped by his brothers, Gustave and Claude, embarked on works of reinforced concrete. This material, invented by the engineers, was for Perret the principal means of a very noble construction

Perret was fully imbued with the idea that architectural forms are essentially structural forms, though capable of infinite and subtle modifications in the interests of proportion. Perhaps the most remarkable example of his perspicacity was his early awareness that reinforced concrete has a structural dignity of its own. These principles, Auguste Perret, did not cease to illustrate for the last fifty years with his teachings and with his examples.

All through his long career, Auguste Perret has built all kinds of edifices, dwelling houses, garages, theatres, churches, towers, museums, stores, public buildings, etc. The list of his works and of his projects, is indeed very long, and includes the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris; Eglise du Raincy; Palais de bois; Porte Maillot; Paris; Théâtre de l'Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; Salle de l'Ecole Normale de Musique, Rue Cardinet, Paris, Musée des Travaux Publics, Paris, Project for the Palais des Soviets, Moscow; Cathédrale d'Oran.

M. Auguste Perret, who has for so long met with strong opposition and who was so often misunderstood has in 1945 been given the chance that he has for so long deserved. The magnificent reconstruction of Le Havre and Marseilles, of which he was the architect in chief, have earned for him the title of "Father of Concrete Architecture" and remain his greatest monuments.

SECTION E.

Project presented by:

Prof. M. Piacentini and

Prof. Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo — Architects
with the collaboration of:

Architect Giorgio Santoro,

Prof. Giorgio Quaroni — painter,

Architect Giuseppe Persichetti — Sculptor.

Ingegnere Antonio Venturini — Acoustics Consultant,

Ditta de Micheli — Air Conditioning Consultants

Ditta C.E.I.E.T. — associated to Edison — Electricity Installations
consultants.

Ditta Maschinenfabrik Augsburg Nurburg — Stage Consultants.



Marcello Piacentini.



Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo.

Prof. Marcello Piacentini, Architect.

Academician D'Italia, Member of the Accademia Nazionale di S. Lucia, Director of the 'Rivista Architettura', Member of the Comitato Urbanistico and of the Commissione Edilizia di Roma, Member of the Consiglio Superiore Antichità e Belle Arti, President of the Faculty of Architecture, University of Rome, Gold Medalist. Awarded honours by Germany, Belgium, France, and Italy.

Since the award of the diploma of architect in 1912 won 14 different competitions in architectural projects such as the transformation of the centre of Bergamo and gained 2 special prizes; awarded the Gran Prix in architecture in five world exhibitions including the one at San Francisco where he gained the only grand prix among 78 nations.

Planned the layout of Via Nazionale, and many other important centres throughout Italy.

Erected or reconstructed more than 37 public buildings including 7 Theatres amongst which il Teatro Reale dell'Opera, Rome; the Auditorium Pio; 3 cinemas and several palaces.

Has published 10 books on architecture and 68 other publications.

Prof. Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo — Architect. Professor of the Polytechnic at Turin; Professor of Architecture at the University of Rome; Director of the Architectural Institute at the University of Rome; Member of the Consiglio Nazionale Superiore delle Belle Arti and of the Commissione Edilizia, Rome. Member of the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica; Member of the Accademia Nazionale di S. Lucia.

Has, since starting practice in 1913, won various competitions in town planning and architecture including the layout of Varese.

Entrusted by the Government of Brazil in conjunction with Professor Piacentini with the construction of the University City of Rio de Janeiro.

Has executed important works throughout Italy and abroad including the planning and construction of the area near Via XX Settembre, Via Quattro Fontane and the Zone near the Mausoleo di Augusto including L'Auditorium for 3,000 persons. In conjunction with Professor Piacentini executed important works at S. Paulo, Brazil. Important projects were also executed in Albania.

Has planned and constructed La Sala di Concerto of the Societa Filarmonica Romana.

SECTION F.

Projects presented by:

Dott. Ing. Cav. Marcello Zavelani-Rossi with the collaboration of:

Dr. Alziro Bergonzo — Architectural consultant

Dr. Franco Galanti — Electrical Installations consultant

Dr. Prof. Gino Sacerdote — Acoustics Consultant

Dr. Prof. Silvio Bassi — Stage Layout Consultant

Dr. Ing. Pompeo Stabon — Stage Machinery and Equipment Consultant.

Ing. L. Chieragatti — Air Conditioning Consultant.



M. Zavelani Rossi.

Dott. Ing. Cav. Marcello Zavelani-Rossi Chevalier of the order of the "Corona d'Italia", Trained at the Milan Polytechnic and obtained the degree of architect and civil engineer in 1935.

In private practice was entrusted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Italy with the planning of various buildings including hotels in Albania, fortifications in Dalmatia and Croatia.

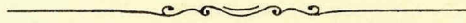
Consultant to the Society "La Dalmatienne" was entrusted in 1943 with the planning of the industrial zone for 3,000 employees in Sebernico in Dalmatia. Town planner of a new city in Dalmatia with a population of 20,000, the project which included most types of buildings, such as houses, offices, a church and theatre was interrupted on the outbreak of hostilities.

Representative of Lombardy in the National Congress for reconstruction held in Rome.

Collaborator in the building of the Manzoni Theatre centre,
Milan.

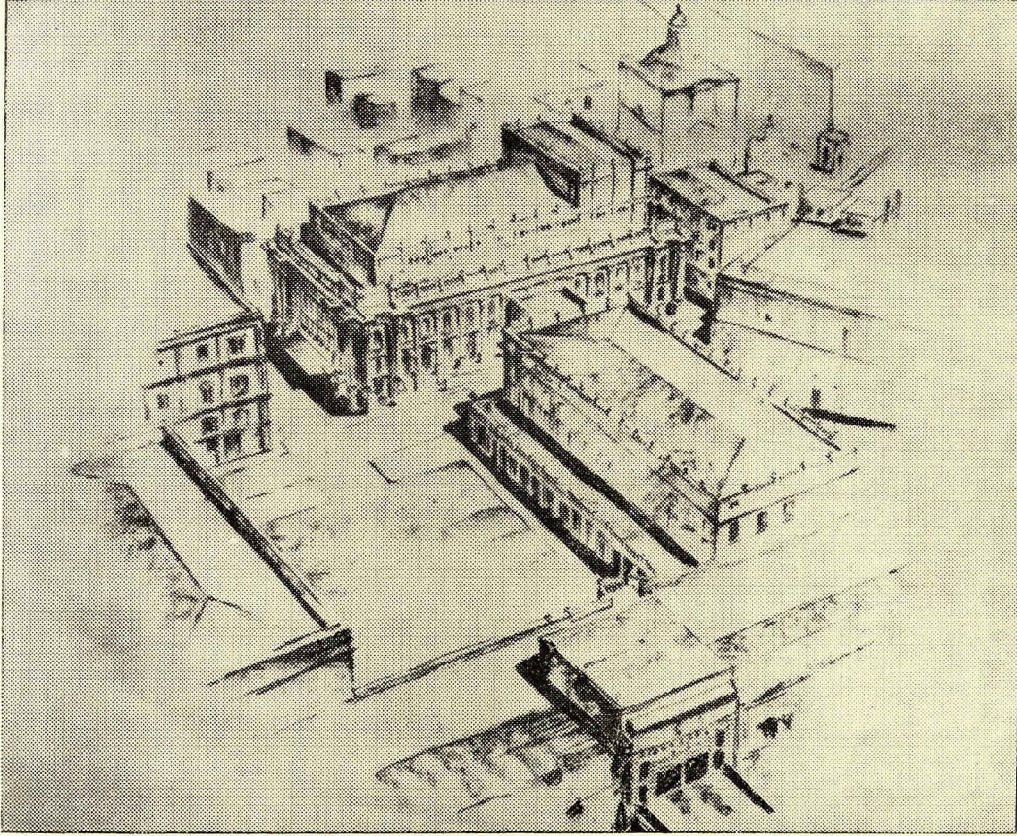
In 1945 was selected as Technical Director of La Scala.

Designed and constructed "La Piccola Scala" and executed
various improvements and modernization schemes in the "Scala
Theatre".

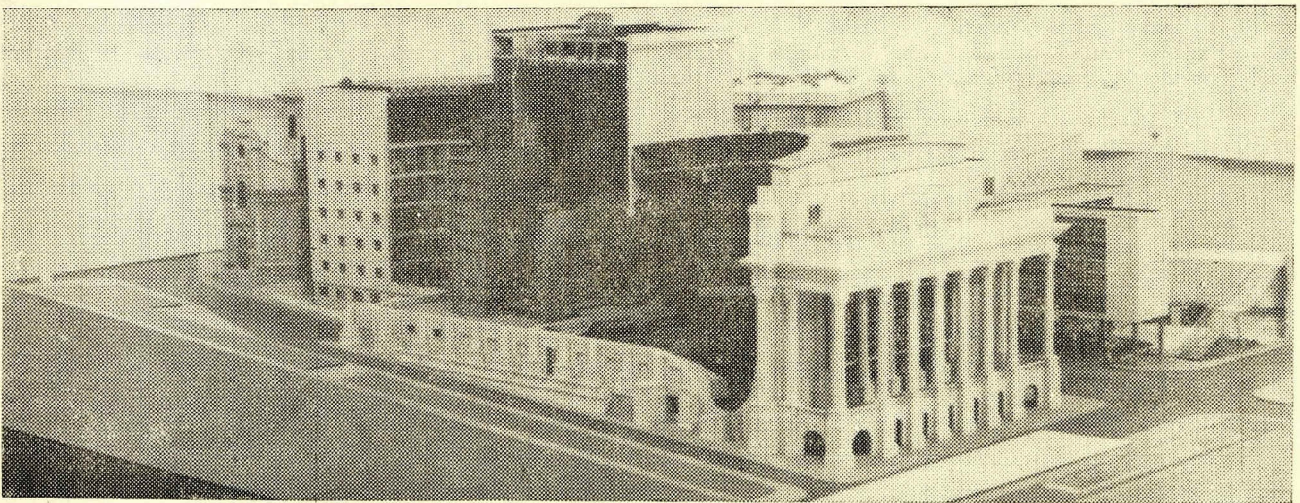


APPENDIX

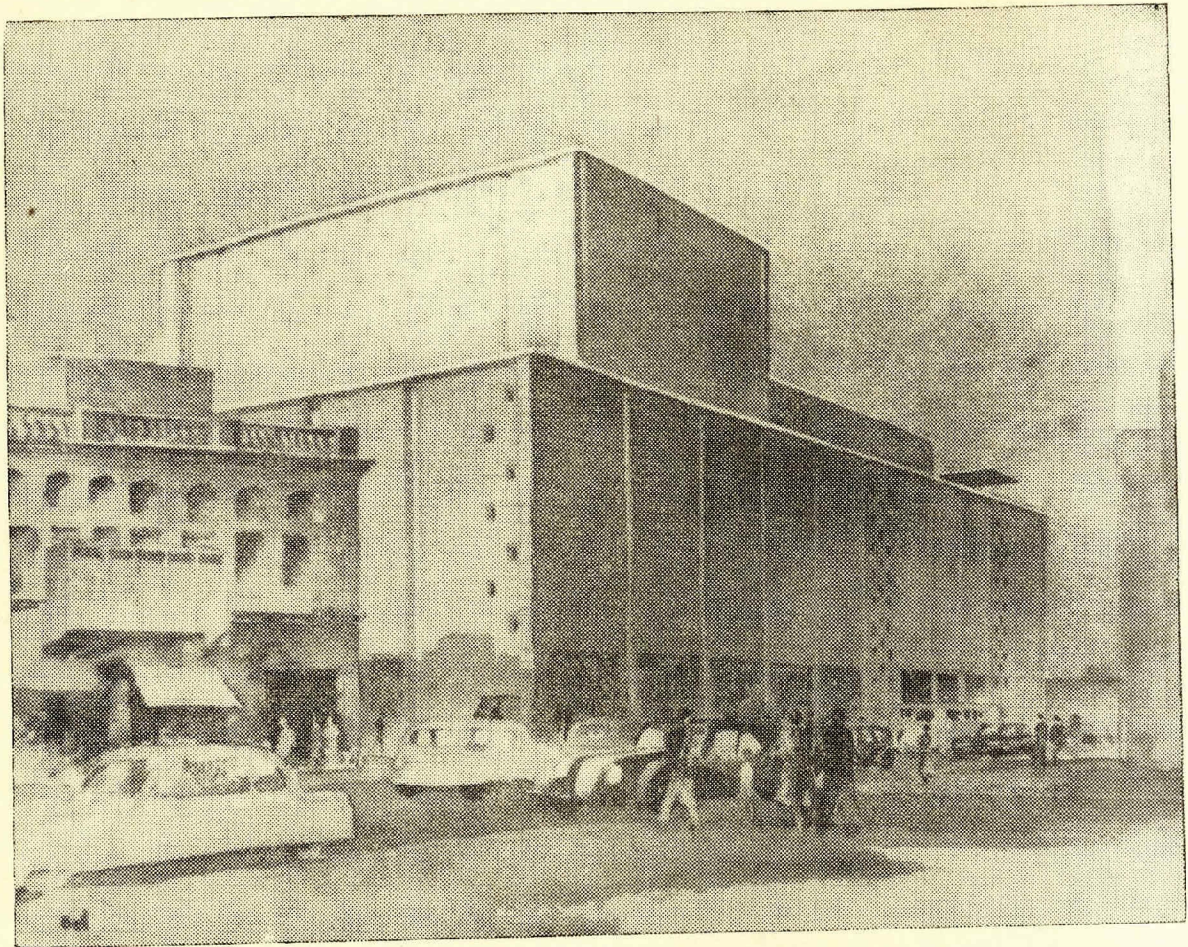
Selected photographs from material submitted by the Architects whose projects for the rebuilding of the Royal Opera House are set forth in the preceding monograph.



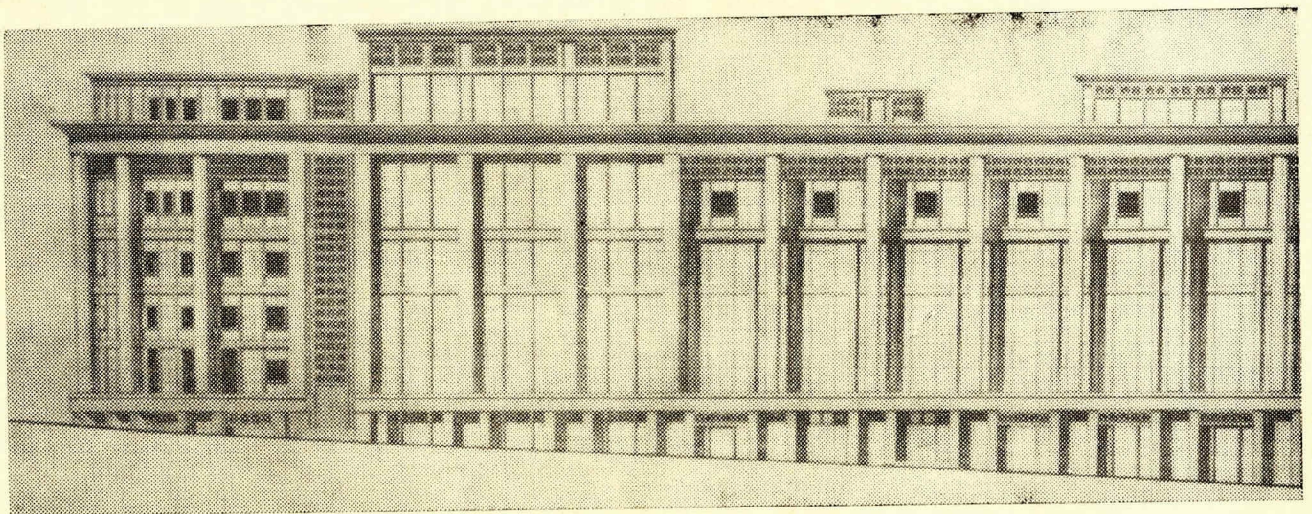
Aerial view of Royal Opera House — Project presented by Prof. E. Boltenstern.



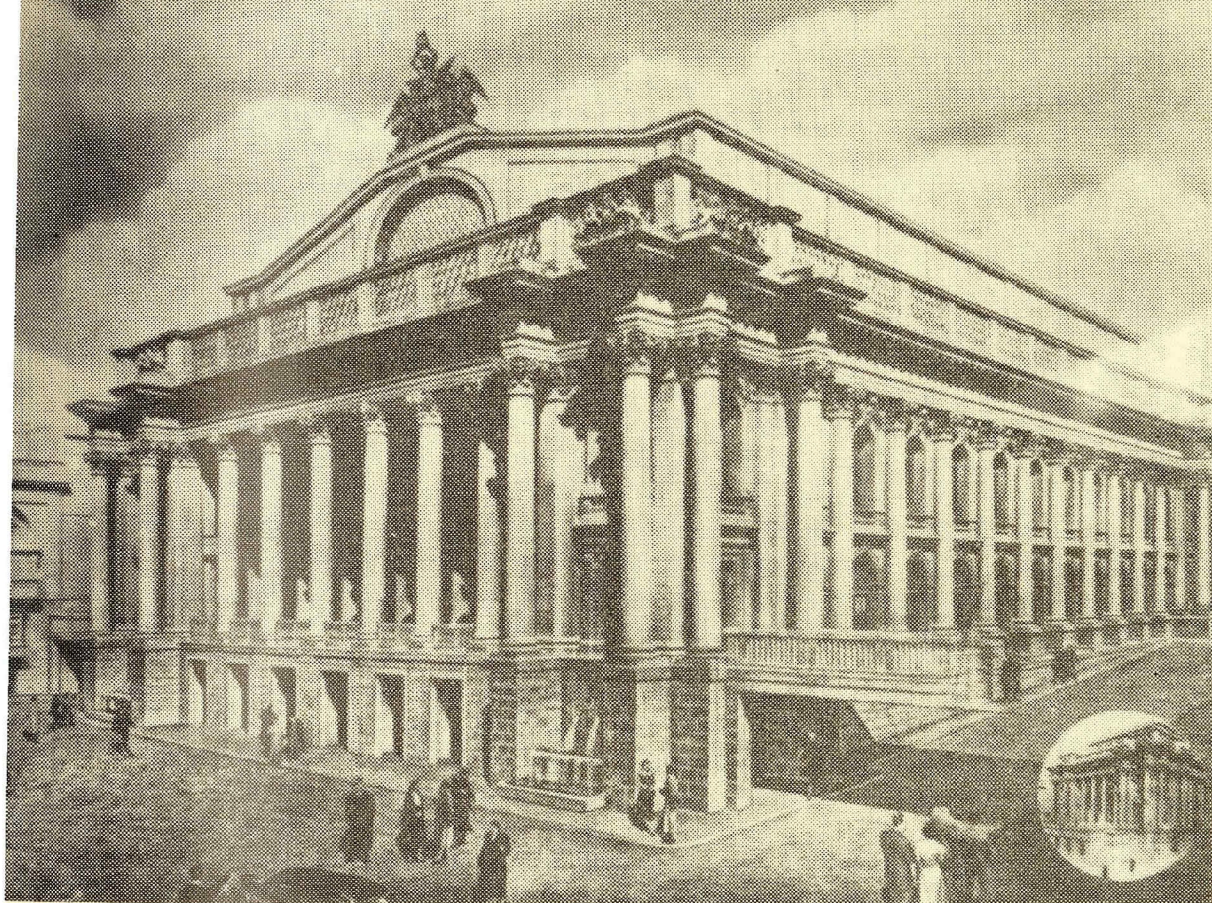
Model of project presented by Mr A. MacDonald, F.R.I.B.A.



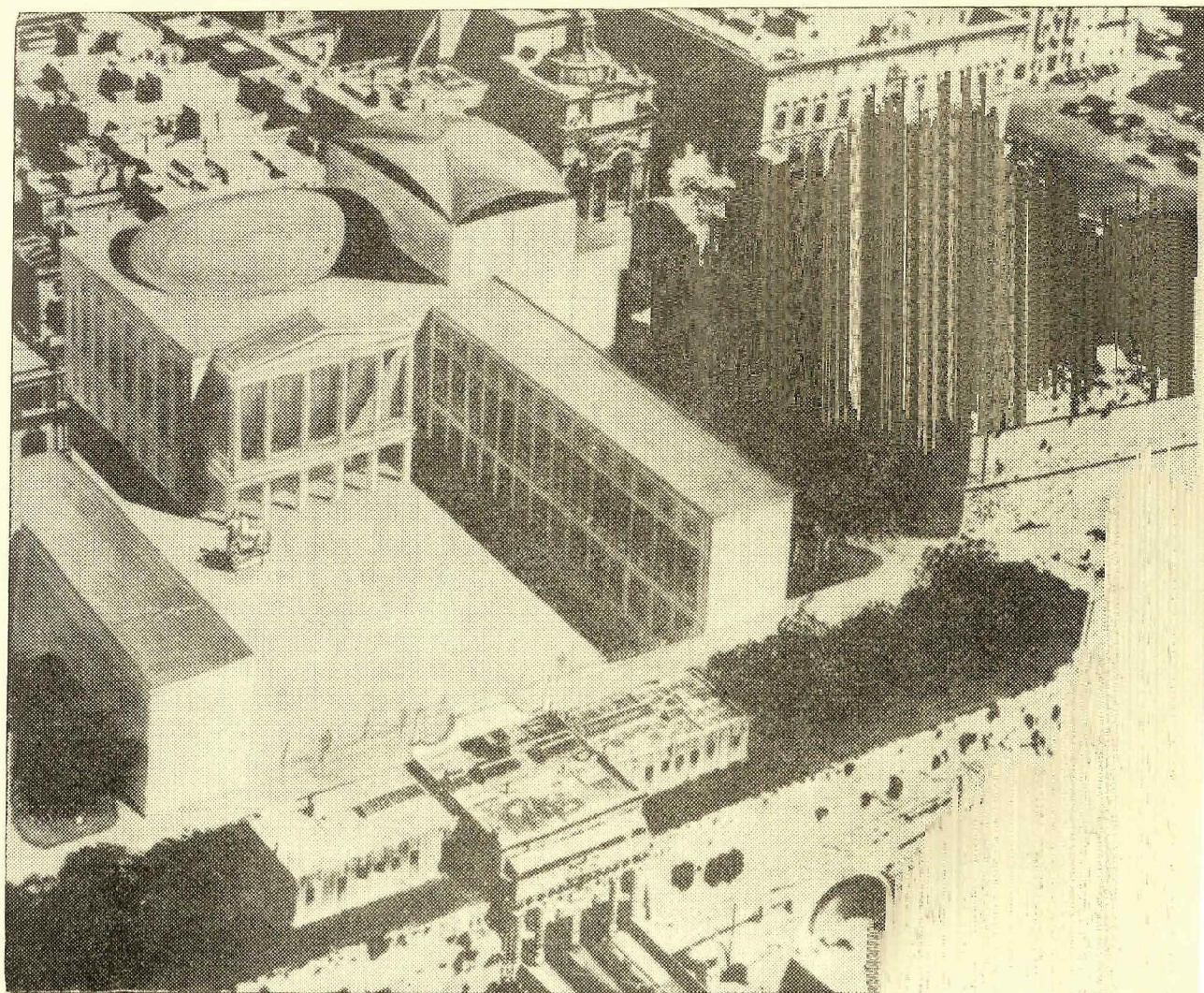
View of Royal Opera House from Kingsway — Project presented by Mr R. S. Nickson, M.A., F.R.I.B.A.



Side elevation of the Royal Opera House — Project presented by M. A. Perret.



Exterior of Royal Opera House — Project presented by Prof. M. Piacentini and Prof. V. Ballio Morpurgo.



Aerial view of Royal Opera House — Project 'B' presented by Dr. Ing. M. Zavelani-Rossi.