ATRE·ABERDEEN culvert (hitherto

ever, was the situation in which John Wyckham Associates found themselves in early 1979 when a 'phone call from Aberdeen posed the question "Do you know anything about grids?" But to begin, very approximately, at the beginning.



The problem was bedevilled, not only by the tumble home of the roof which started approximately 35 feet from stage level but also by the fact that immediately above the OP fly floor was a completely enclosed exit corridor leading from the front of the gallery in the auditorium to the rear of the fly tower. This took the form as far as could be seen from the stage, of a brick box approximately 5 feet 6 inches wide by 7 feet high and running clear from the rear of the proscenium wall to the rear stage. (The reader will by noticed that all now have measurements are given in Imperial as is proper for a building designed and built in the Edwardian era). If any counterweight system was to be placed on the OP wall it therefore had to be onstage of this exit corridor. It had already been decided, by the way, that to place a counterweight frame on the prompt wall would cause even greater difficulties as all access to the dressing room block, offices and

pass doors were through the prompt side wall. So the OP side it was. It was undoubtedly possible to take the counterweight slot through the stage floor into the basement. However, top the of the counterweight frame struck, as it were, the sloping roof above, approximately one-third along its length. The cables leading to the grid pulleys thus passed upward immediately beneath this sloping roof until they had travelled approximately 11 feet further on stage when the sloping roof once more turned into a vertical wall. At this point the cables were diverted slightly upwards and on to the loft blocks placed at high level above the new steel grid which was to be inserted into the building. The steel grid itself could not easily be suspended from the existing structure and it was therefore placed on four long columns, one at each corner, which descended down through the stage into the basement. During construction it

was discovered that the upstage left leg came down squarely on top of a unsuspected) which enclosed the Denburn.

HE structural engineers held their breath and suspended design work until they had discovered a way of overcoming this particular problem. Finally it was decided to raise the entire floor level of the basement below stage with a thick layer of concrete thus spreading the load away from the culvert.

What elaboration! Why not, one may well ask, was the apparently simpler method not adopted of taking off the top of the fly tower, rather like opening an egg, and building a square tower on top. Such a simple action, my friends, is forbidden since it is (and I quote) "a included within the building Secretary of State for Scotland's list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. It is a category A building and is in a conservation area." But that is not all. The upstage portion of the counterweight system had to be double ourchase as there were two main exits at stage level in the vicinity. Not only double purchase, for that would be comparatively simple, but these double purchase sets - or some of them - had to be mounted on the angled wall at the rear of the stage. These sets had to be set off from that wall by means of a triangular steel construction in order to present the pulleys parallel to the setting line. The solution of this problem brought another in its train. The fly floor had to be angled upstage to match the double purchase sets mounted on the angled wall as did the loading Furthermore, above. gallery because the lighting gallery was further onstage than either of the fly galleries so as to be a similar distance from the centre line as the stage left gallery and additionally, at a height between the loading gallery and the fly gallery, there was a nice exercise in geometry to be solved at this point. But Tele-Stage triumphed and the system was installed with surprisingly little trouble and the fifty-two sets of lines (thirteen double purchase) are now operating most successfully. There was one spin-off from the entire planning scheme. Though the counterweight frame had been brought further onstage than the side wall at stage level the reduction in wing space was, to an extent, compensated by the possibility of constructing a double level electrical store at stage level between the counterweight frame and the side wall.

So much for the counterweight system. It became evident very quickly that the installation of the counterweight system, together with the installation of the scenery lift was going to close the building to the public for a longer period than had first been envisaged. We were then asked to report to the Council on possible other improvements which could be made to the theatre and give a programme both short and long term for these improvements.

It was recommended that the following work should be undertaken. A new stage lighting system

A new sound and communication system

Improved facilities for the orchestra at mezzanine level under the stage

Improvements to the paint frame An enlarged orchestra pit and

Complete repainting reseating of the auditorium

Improvements to the box office Improvements to the dressing rooms

In addition to this list the City Architect himself had decided to seek approval to do a certain amount of refurbishment in other Front of House areas and, with the exception of the dressing room block, the substantial part of these proposals was set in motion in the late Autumn of 1980. Certain additions were made during the course of the contract notably the provision of new cinema projection facilities to replace the obsolescent system then in use.

There is absolutely no doubt that the average member of the public is unaware of the technical improvements which are made in theatres. Providing the lights go on and off at what appear to be reasonable times and the curtain goes up and down when it is expected to; providing he can hear what is happening on stage as well as see it; providing he is comfortable in his seat and can get a drink easily in the interval your average member of the public is reasonably happy.

There is also no doubt that, the theatre having been closed for two years, the AM of the P will expect to see something for his money when the building reopens; even more so when he believes that all the building that has been done has been at his own expense via the rates.

T was for these reasons that the Council decided that, almost above all the auditorium should be completely redecorated. They were lucky to secure the services of that well-known stage designer Peter Rice who drew up two schemes for the interior of the auditorium of which the Council chose the one which had a rather more classical feel. He proposed that all the seating should be re-covered in a rich red and that the walls and ornamentation of the auditorium be painted in a number of shades of

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