Architect's note

It was realized in the early stages of planning the new buildings to accommodate the Arts faculty of the University of Western Australia, that there would be enough spread to allow for one or two courtyards. A block of study rooms was required in three storeys—the same number as in the Elizabethan Fortune theatre—and it was thought that a courtyard might be designed with the proportions of an Elizabethan theatre.

The plan for the study block developed into a long courtyard closed across the west end by a swing of seminar rooms served by wide ambulatories on the courtyard side. By dividing the courtyard with a three-storied bridge running north and south from level to level and by completing the balconies on the north and south of the west half of the courtyard, some of the main features of the original Fortune theatre were created. The stage was built against the bridge which is the framework for the tiring-house dressing and the correct orientation was achieved. A spiral staircase is incorporated in the bridge to allow actors to move from level to level in the tiring-house. Thus, by adapting bridge and balconies inherent in the study block design, the stage is the only main feature added to the original brief for the building.

The main dimensions of the Elizabethan Fortune are specified in the original contract document of 1599, but other details were obtainable only from what is variously shown in sketches prepared from scholarly conjecture. The dimensions of the original contract, 55' square between balconies and 27'6" x 43' wide of the stage, have been faithfully adhered to in the New Fortune.

There is little knowledge of the materials used in all the wall surfaces of the original theatre. The balcony construction would have been timber, and it is thought that the wall surfaces would have been rough, soft plastered nogging infill to half timbering. The walls of the New Fortune are brick, with brick paved concrete floors. 7" steel pipe supports bush hammered concrete arches and beams. The balustrading is of tubular steel and the roof lining of the bridge is jarrah board.

As the stage was to be open to the sky there was argument for using concrete with a false floor of boarding in its construction. The difficulties in storing the boarding when not in use pointed towards the final choice which is a stage made from a durable local timber, wandoo. This is permanently fixed with spacing to allow rain to run to the ground below.

The stage is made level and set at the height of the ground floor bridge. An upper stage is incorporated with the first floor of the bridge at a height low enough for an actor to be able to leap onto the main stage below. All balust-
Sketch of the New Fortune by the architect (Mr. Marshall Clifton) showing the stage, set up with tiring-house after J. C. Adams.

Railing on these upper levels of the bridge are removable and the main supports allow for the attachment of dressing to create the tiring-house facade. Trap doors are incorporated in the stage floor with access under, made possible by deeper excavation.

The depth of the pit is fixed so as to allow an eye-level view just above the stage to a seated audience, rather than the eye-level view probable for a standing audience in most of the old Elizabethan theatres.

The two columns on the stage correspond to those carrying the heavens canopy in the Elizabethan theatre. For the sake of flexibility they have been made removable. A permanent flagstaff is hoisted high above the bridge to carry and show the play's flag to the passer-by outside the buildings.

All lighting is controlled from the main switch board on the top balcony opposite the tiring-house. Change rooms for the actors are located adjacent to the ends of the bridge on each floor.

Any fault in acoustics noticeable when the auditorium is empty should be eliminated when the theatre has an audience.

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