

White Heat London 10 / Healthcare

Greenwich District Hospital Technological medical centre

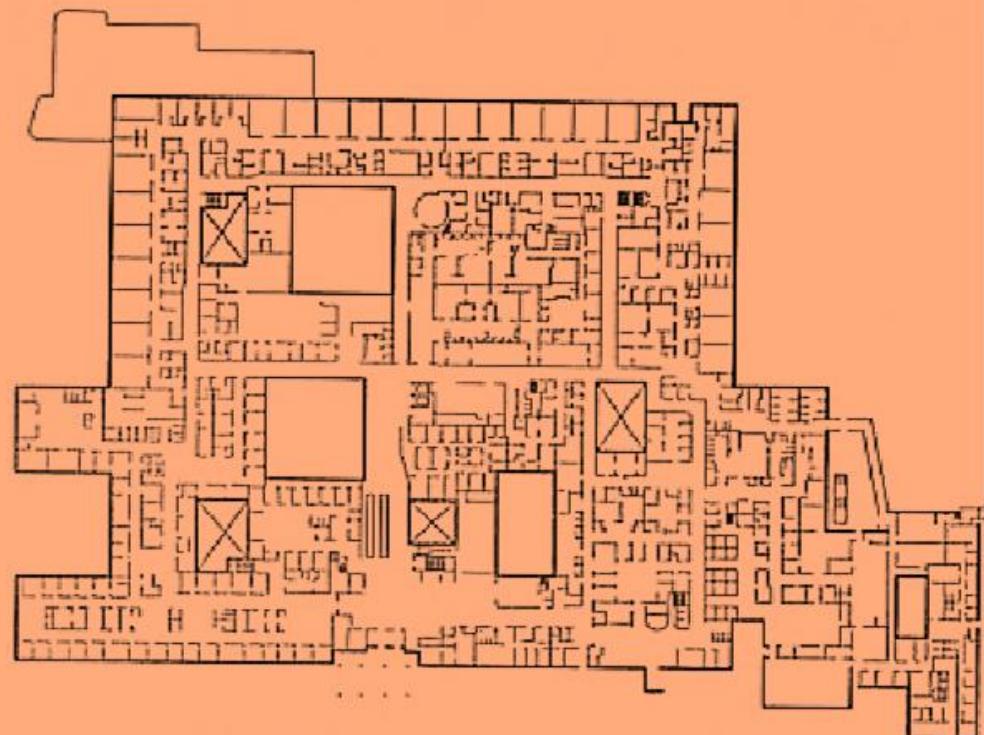
Howard Goodman under William Tatton Brown

1965-69

The National Health Service inherited hospitals that varied in location, size and facilities. By the early 1960s, improvements in treatment options and a belief that rationalisation could serve more people more efficiently led to the commissioning of large, general-purpose hospitals. Similar Modernist theories of analysis and control would inform their layout, technology and architecture. Replacing two smaller local hospitals, Greenwich District Hospital in Maze Hill was built in three stages, the first opening as the decade ended.

Beds for 800 patients were fitted into a single urban block of just four stories by planning in layers and using mechanisation. Wards filled the perimeter of the plot, naturally lit and connected by a public corridor. Off this and toward the centre of the building were ancillary rooms. These, in turn, opened onto an inner, private 'hospital street'. Finally, filling the centre of the block, were the artificially lit operating theatres, radiography rooms and laboratories. Servicing was via the basement, with supplies and waste despatched to and received from the relevant floor in containers via an automated vertical paternoster using an 'electric eye' sensor and horizontal trolley trains. Lifts and escalators did the same for people. Cables, pipes and ducts were housed between floors in spaces tall enough for a standing man so that maintenance would not disturb staff or patients.

The hospital functioned for forty years before redevelopment in 2006.





Greenwich was based on post-war work in the United States that applied operational research and related disciplines to the complex, inter-connected activities of a hospital. The resulting 'racetrack' plan aimed to both separate and speed up different workflows whilst also improving hygiene. An aerial view shows the three landscaped internal courtyards at Greenwich, the only breaks in a densely-packed plan. None of the windows opened, mechanical ventilation being considered more effective at infection control.

Here 64'-long pre-cast concrete floor beams are being lowered into place to create the Universal Hospital Space, a concept developed in Britain that combined a structural framework of as few fixed points as possible with flexible interiors formed from moveable elements. Each beam incorporates a section of truss for the services sub-floor, this an idea borrowed from Louis Kahn's Alfred Newton Richards Medical Research Building in Philadelphia, completed in 1961. Vertical risers were concentrated into four areas, further minimising intrusion into the floor space.

The grid-like façades include ward glazing, recessed behind the structural members, and louvres denoting the services sub-floors. The raised basement also housed a car park.