

White Heat London 6 / Entertainment

Odeon Marble Arch World's most sophisticated cinema

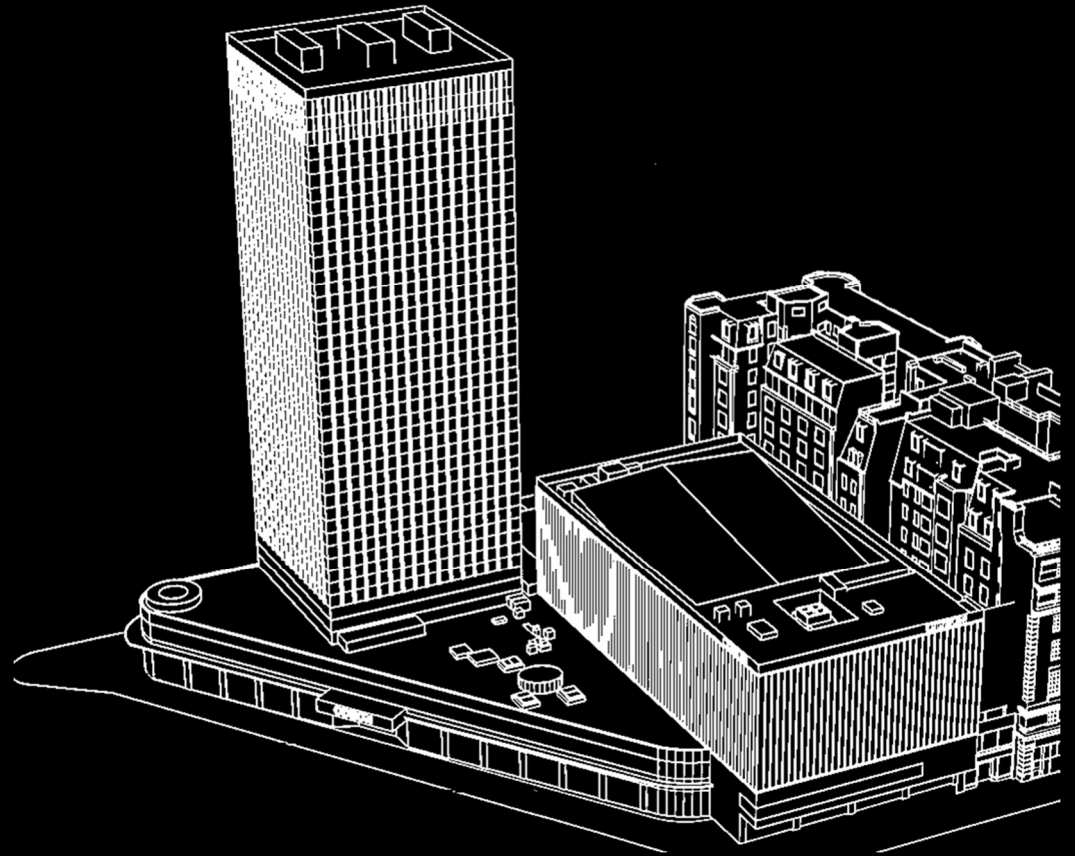
T.P. Bennett and Son

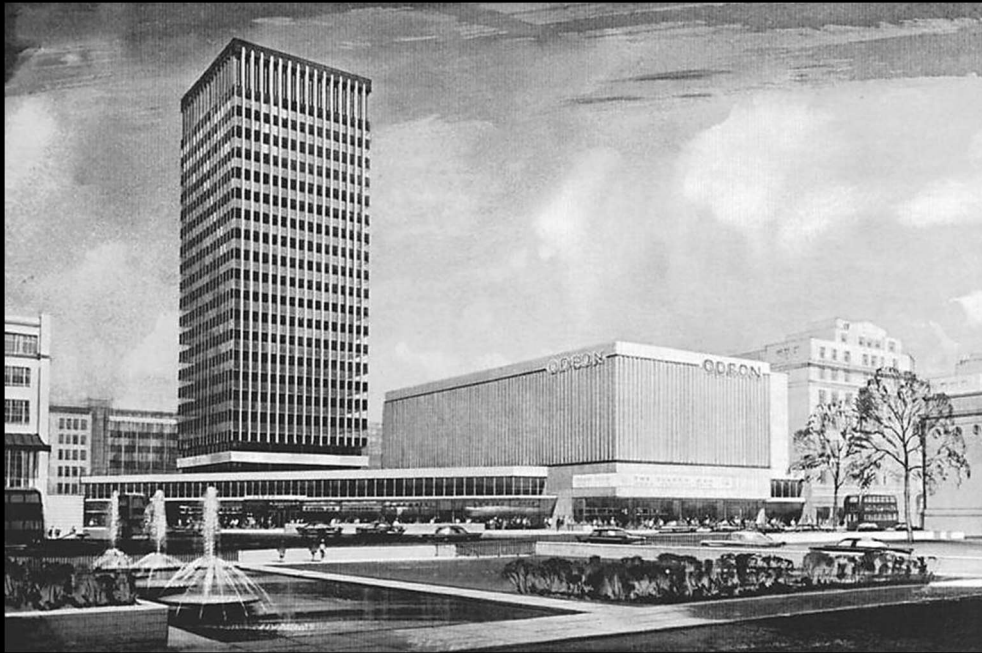
1964-67

There had been a cinema at the junction of the Edgware Road and Oxford Street, opposite Marble Arch, since 1928 but by the middle of the 1960s the growth of television was affecting revenues and a complete redevelopment was deemed necessary to win audiences back. The result was the largest cinema to have been constructed in Britain since the war, and one that featured many 'firsts.'

Built around a screen 75' wide, 30' high and with a depth of curvature of 17', itself the largest in the country, the new Odeon was the first cinema to be equipped with the D-150 all-purpose optical system. Intended as an integrated system of lenses for the photography and exhibition of motion pictures, this could handle both traditional 35mm films and those made in the recently-revived 70mm format. Its increased resolution and widescreen shape was seen as the key to enticing cinemagoers away from the 'box' in their living rooms.

Behind the scenes, a centralised control system automated many aspects of the operation – including the starting, stopping and change-over of the projectors and sound, the opening and closing of curtains and masking, and the lighting – according to a pre-programmed timetable. The same system alerted the manager when needed and he and his team could also use closed-circuit television, an early installation of that technology. In common with many single-screen cinemas, the Odeon Marble Arch was first 'split' (in 1997) and then closed, this in 2016.





Part of a mixed-use development that included a square office tower and shops in a triangular podium, the cinema was massed as a rectangular box. To minimise traffic noise and vibration from tunnels below the site, it was built on resilient mountings and had a sound-absorbing backing to the screen.

The entrance lobby featured escalators for the first time in a British cinema. They led to separate lounges for stalls and circle patrons (the latter via a spiral stair) and the ladies' powder room. The décor by Trevor and Mavis Stone Ltd included fibre glass moulded in abstract shapes, frosted light fittings and a planted pond near the bar.

Beyond this lay the auditorium, accommodating 1,360 in unusually wide seats. White textured fibre glass panelling was fitted to the side walls, backed with gold glass cloth. Lighting effects were used during intermissions.