

White Heat London 1 / Television

BBC Television Centre Europe's largest production studios

Graham Dawbarn

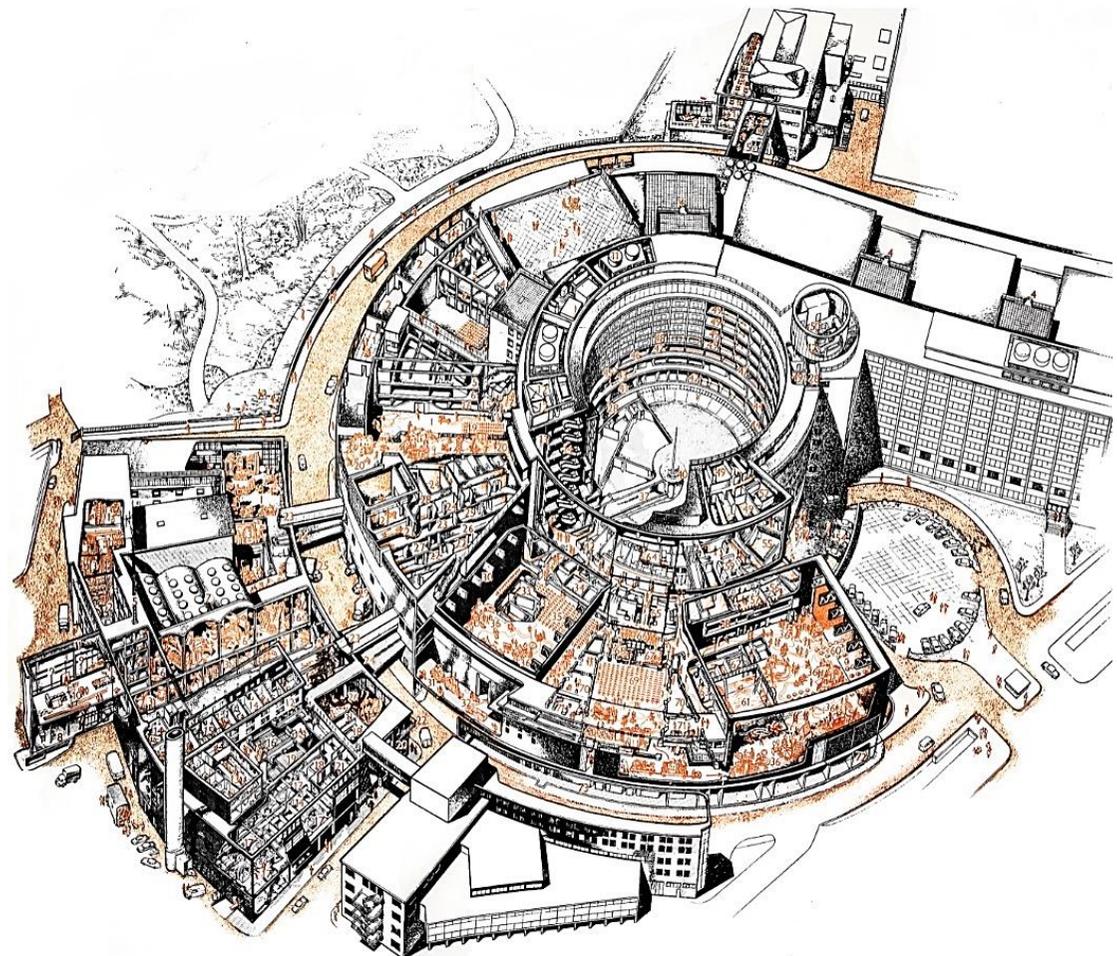
1954-60

Sketched by Dawbarn as a question mark on an envelope at the close of 1949, 'TC' was purpose-built for the nation's only broadcaster with efficiency in mind yet also the future. Provision for colour, video recording and expansion were all incorporated in the Wood Lane complex.

Brick boxes of varying sizes contained the studios, arranged in a half-circle with service routes around the outside connecting them to each other and the scenery workshops beyond. Rising above them was an inner ring housing offices and other facilities that was glazed toward the street and central courtyard, which is about the same size as Piccadilly Circus and marked by a gilded sculpture of Helios by T.B. Huxley-Jones atop a column. Beneath this were further technical areas.

The architecture was Contemporary, the more homely post-war interpretation of Modernism, featuring coloured mosaic such as John Piper's lobby mural and cantilevered staircases. As intended, further studios were added over the next thirty years; they formed the 'tail' of that question mark.

The BBC disposed of the building in 2013 but retains a presence in the remodelled site, which includes studios.





On completion, Studio 1 to the left of the car park began the sequence of production spaces. Above the glazed stair tower to the right, the small glass-clad drum disguises the lift motor room and ventilation plant by repeating the form of the inner ring. This was partly raised on *pilotis*, a key feature of Modernism.

Visitors were welcomed by Piper's mosaic and a view through floor-to-ceiling windows. Less obviously, the circular layout equalised cable runs between each studio and the equipment beneath the courtyard, aiding the electronics of the day, and allowed them to function independently.

Finished before construction of the inner ring and studios had even started, the top-lit scenery block was used in conjunction with BBC premises elsewhere until post-war building restrictions were lifted. An electrically adjusted paint frame eased the creation of backdrops. The British theatrical tradition assisted elsewhere given almost all transmissions were live at the time, even drama.