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The Sick Tower

Five Ways Tower is a 23 storey, 249 feet (76m) tall office building in Edgbaston, Birmingham. It was completed in 1979 to house additional government and commercial offices overflowing from the neighbouring Five Ways House, which it is connected too. It sits in a prime location, a futuristic plate glass skyscraper that looms over well-to do Georgian Edgbaston.

It's an unlikely and unloved beast, at odds with its leafy setting. In its time, Five Ways Tower was lauded and awarded for its audacious sci-fi architecture (soaring walls of black glass, sleek brick facings, angular columns, lofted podiums). There's no denying that it is an unusual, ambitious building, reminiscent of the moneyed towers of London (or a secret base for International Rescue).

Despite these initial plaudits, the tower hid a secret malaise, a festering disease within its very bones. Over the years the Tower was reputedly an unhappy and uncomfortable place to work in. After its last tenants moved out in 2005, reports were leaked out to the media that the building had been making people unwell. Local media dubbed it with an unfortunate name, 'The Sick Tower of Brum'.

Since that time the tower has stood empty, abandoned, unwanted. Investors shied away, reluctant to involve themselves in an expensive clean up and redevelopment. Over the last 18 years it has inevitably fallen in to a ruinous state. It is a place that I pass by all the time on the bus. I find myself watching out for it. It's grimly fascinating, watching it slowly being torn to pieces, entropy in action.

Over the last year or so this entropy has accelerated. The walls of plate glass have been punctured and blown out on many levels, whilst graffiti tags litter the highest heights. When I visited to take my photos a new security cordon had been put in place, demolition signs fresh up on gleaming Arris fencing. The Sick Tower of Brum is finally being put to sleep.
