



Central Telegraph Office and BT Centre – a timeline

- 1869** Work started on building the General Post Office (West) on a plot on Newgate Street and St Martin's Le Grand.
- 1874** On 4 February the Central Telegraph Office (CTO) was transferred from Telegraph Street to the General Post Office (West). GPO West was constructed of granite and Portland stone and was originally four storeys high. Although initially built as a headquarters building, the increasing popularity of telegraphic communication, reflected in the increase in the number of staff and quantity of equipment, meant that the CTO gradually occupied more of the building to meet this demand.
- 1884** A fifth floor was added to the building.
- 1891** The London-Paris telephone service, inaugurated on 1 April, was controlled and worked from the CTO until 1904 when it was transferred to the Central Telephone Exchange in GPO South, Carter Lane.
- 1896** On 27 July Guglielmo Marconi (1874-1937) gave the first demonstration of wireless telegraphy to members of the Post Office administration. A transmitter was placed on the roof of the CTO and a receiver on the roof of GPO South in Carter Lane 300 yards away.
- 1917** During wartime such an important communications centre was an obvious target. On 17 a bomb dropped by enemy aircraft struck the CTO causing damage to the south east corner of the fourth floor. A section of the roof parapet fell down and killed a soldier on sentry duty in the street, but no employees were injured.
- 1940** On 29 December the CTO was set alight by burning debris from adjacent buildings and the interior was totally destroyed. The shell of the building was refurbished to the first and second floors, and the unsafe upper floors dismantled.
- 1943** The building was reopened in June, although by this time much of the telegraph work had been transferred to the outskirts of London.
- 1945-46** In its heyday the CTO had direct communication with every large town in the UK and was the largest telegraph office in the world. At the peak of the telegraph service in 1945-46 it dealt with 64.9 million telegrams.
- 1959** Following the war, telegraph traffic declined as more people turned to the telephone, and the CTO never regained its pre-war importance. During 1959 work was gradually transferred to other locations.
- 1962** In October the CTO was closed.
- 1967** The CTO was declared unsafe and demolished.
- 1975-79** During this period a number of excavations were carried out by the Department of Urban Archaeology of the Museum of London. These provided information on the earlier history of the site.
- 1979** Planning permission was granted for the construction of a new building on the site.



1984

BT Centre, a new headquarters building designed by the Property Services Agency, was opened in June on the site of the former CTO. The new design was a large granite and Portland stone building around an atrium. Its style was modern and forward looking, but the building materials used echoed the old GPO West. It was much larger than the building it replaced and completely covered the route of the old Bath Street, closed in 1934. The main entrance of BT Centre follows the line of the former street.

1997-99

The interior of the building was extensively refurbished to make better use of space, conform to modern approaches to working, and exploit the latest telecommunications technology for more effective and fulfilling working.