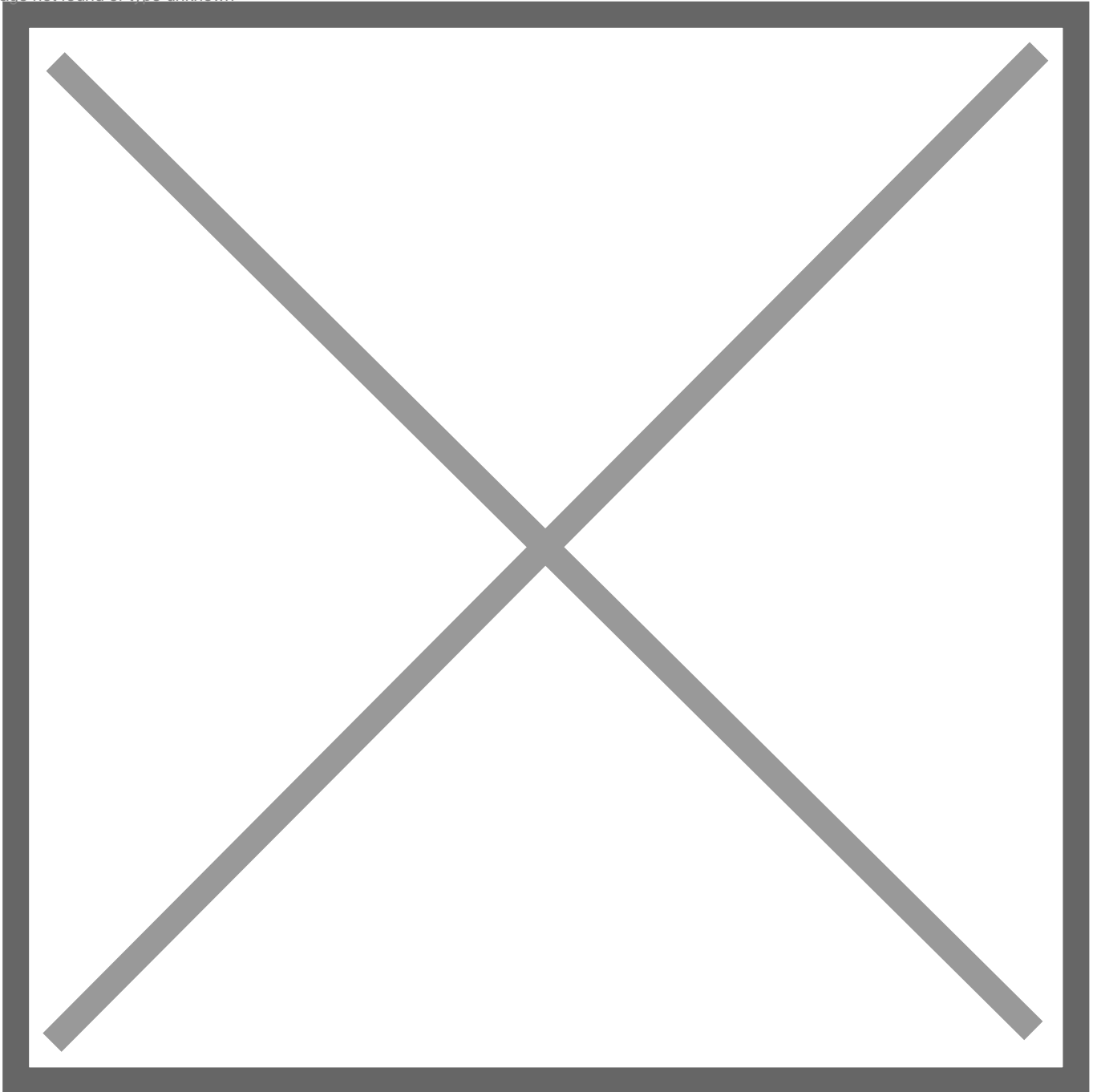


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Penguin Pool, London Zoo

United Kingdom

Zoological Gardens 15/3 Regent's Park
London NW1 4RY London

Commission

1934

Completion

1934

Original use

Culture/leisure/tourism/zoo

Current use

Culture/leisure/tourism/zoo

Architects

Berthold Lubetkin, Tecton Group

Engineers

Ove Arup

Concrete by reinforcement

Reinforced concrete

Construction method

Cast-in-place concrete, in-situ concrete

Architectural concrete

Architectural concrete

Structural types

One-dimensional/ [trussed] beam, One-dimensional/arch [bridge]

Description

The penguin pool at the London Zoo was designed in 1934 by Berthold Lubetkin, an architect of Russian origin who emigrated to England, along with Lindsay Drake from the Tecton Group, a group of architects committed to modernity of which he was co-founder. This small building is an indisputable icon of modern architecture in England. It not only forged new formal paths, it also revealed the expressive potentials of a new material: reinforced concrete. A decisive factor in the development of the design was that the architects relied on a collaboration with the prestigious engineer Ove Arup. The result is a structural feat: two overlapping helical white concrete ramps, 14 meters long each, that hover above the pool, without any apparent support, ending in the water. Lubetkin received the commission after having designed the Gorilla House for the same zoo a few years earlier. This new project incorporated participation from psychologists specialized in animal behavior. The aim was to offer the penguins a space that reinterpreted the forms of their natural habitat, thus allowing them to carry out the same type of movements that they would in nature. The results include the level of the oval-shaped pool, sunken with respect to the surrounding space, and the concrete wall that surrounds it, with strategically placed openings to allow observation of the animals and minimize possible interference from visitors. Following these successful experiments with architecture for animals, the Tecton Group was commissioned to build an entire zoo in Dudley, England.

This ability to transfer, in an apparently simple way, the functional needs of a program that lacked any existing precedents onto a space built by exploring the possibilities of a new construction technology, concrete, makes this small penguin pool exceptional and a reference point in modern architecture.

Though restored in 1987, the penguin pool has lost its use since 2004.

Links

[V&A](#)

[Archeyes](#)

[Concrete Quaterly 157, 1988](#)