

### SIMON FELTON

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Rackhams, or House of Fraser as it is now titled, is a landmark on Corporation Street in Birmingham city centre and also an historical and social landmark. For those who remember it, and I count myself here, the department store will be forever Rackhams with the memories each of us attaches to it. Indeed it's even become a term of social comment with the phrase *the back of Rackhams* (<https://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/12-weird-wonderful-brummie-phrases-8069132>).

Situated with entrances on four sides, North Western Arcade, Cherry Street, Temple Row and Corporation Street, it acts as an urban block and as a landmark for reference due to its distinctive exterior of zig-zag glazing that is viewed from Temple Row and Corporation Street.

The building was built between 1955 and 1966 with the store opening in phases between 1960 and 1966 and is eight storeys tall with Portland stone cladding and the ground floor shop fronts clad in granite, designed initially for Harrods and later for House of Fraser who took over Harrods in 1959 (<https://c20society.org.uk/department-stores/house-of-fraser-birmingham>).

At Christmas it had lights down its frontage on Corporation Street but the view of Rackhams with its zig-zag pattern is one that you could aim for as you walked down *The Ramp*, in its many guises as Birmingham Shopping Centre/The Pallasades and now Grand Central. The zig-zag pattern on its Temple Row façade is equally distinctive, with the glazing and shopping floor windows overlooking St. Philip's Place and Birmingham Cathedral. The many trees in the grounds of St Philip's Cathedral partially obscure the façade, but the distinctive shape of this eight storey block helps it to act as a landmark and also a boundary to the square that is St Philip's Place.

The building now faces a possible renewed future with potential regeneration plans following House of Fraser being acquired by Sports Direct owner Mike Ashley, but for many it will be a social landmark even if its appearance changes, although the name of any future building as The Rackhams Building will preserve the landmark name as its external image changes.