

**Arts Floor (1st floor)** The Art Library was originally the lending library, with aisles and a central nave. It had terracotta columns and arches and a **vaulted ceiling**, covered up when the City Museum was in the building but since revealed. The book-cases were of American walnut. The side room was a small museum, only 22 square feet, containing among other exhibits a celebrated stuffed crocodile bought for 3 guineas and guaranteed not to shrink when washed! The **Leeds City Police Headquarters** were located in these rooms 1934-1965.



*Can you spot the sign for the Criminal Investigation Department, which was originally housed on the 1st floor?*

**Information Floor (2nd floor)** The Local and Family History Library was originally a reference library and remains largely unchanged, except for redecoration and carpeting. The room is 36ft high with terracotta alcoves. The **oak ceiling** is divided by wrought iron principals into panels, and there are **mirrored panels** at each end at gallery level. The 15ft-long English walnut tables are part of the original furniture.



*A lift was first installed in 1898 to transport users to the reference section*

- Visit the **Local and Family History Library** on the 2nd floor to find out more about the building.
- Log onto **www.leodis.net** to see more old photographs.

For more information call 0113 3785005 or visit [www.leeds.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/libraries)

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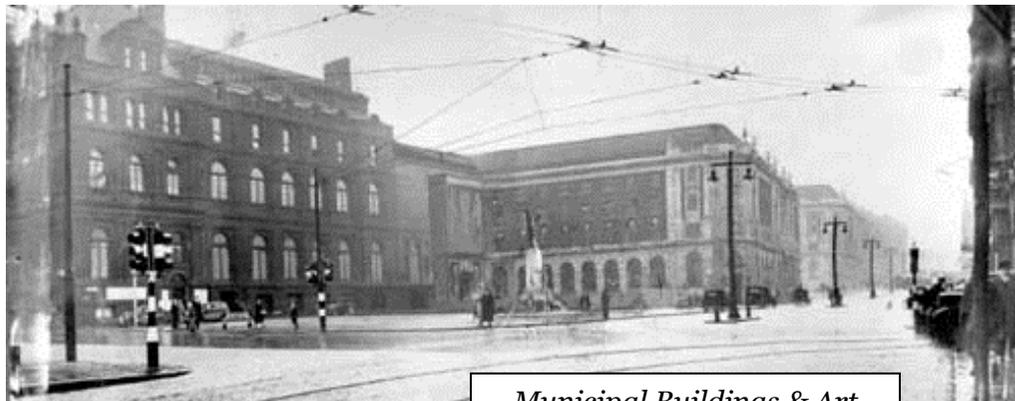
## A History of Leeds Central Library

**“There is nothing finer in architectural effort in the whole of Leeds than the central hall of the building”**

*– The Yorkshireman, 1884*

Central Library is a Grade II\* listed building constructed 1878-1884 and designed by Leeds' own George Corson. Opened on 17 April 1884 as the **Leeds Municipal Offices**, it originally housed various administration departments, including those for gas, water and rates, the Borough Engineer, sanitary department and a public library. The total cost of the building was around £120,000.

**Building exterior** The building was constructed using Yorkshire stone from local quarries at Dacre Bank, Harehills, Meanwood and Weetwood. Corson was a perfectionist and instructed the contractors how to lay the stones to minimise weathering. The roof is Westmoreland slate. The entrance steps are Shap granite, a slip-proof material widely used for kerb edges. The exterior columns are also granite and it would have taken much work to get them perfectly smooth.



*Municipal Buildings & Art Gallery, 1936*

**Calverley Street entrance and stairwell** This was originally the main entrance. The foyer pillars are Devonshire marble and the doors to the stairwell have alabaster surrounds, probably brought from Nottinghamshire. Foundation stones are set over the inner entrance doors. In the stairwell itself, the carved areas are made of limestone from Caen, Normandy, as this is softer than English limestone and easier to carve. The pillars are Devonshire marble and the windowsills Devonian marble (the same material as the seats on the stairways). The blue and white tiles with a floral motif are made by Smith & Co. of Coalville. Those near the lift are by Minton, Hollins & Co. The brown tiled border was probably supplied by Maw & Co.

**Central Lending (ground floor)** The current lending library was originally the office where people came to pay their rates, gas and water bills. It measured 78ft by 38ft and had a counter 62ft long. The central portion was for the Water Department, the right side for the Rates Department, and the left for Gas. Beyond the counter was a row of double desks to seat clerks. There are still the original Victorian tiles on the wall.

**Tiled Hall (original reading room)** This café was originally the main library reading room and is 80ft long by 40ft. The floor is parquet, made of oak, ebony and walnut. During the room's most recent restoration, a gallery and shelving put up in the 50s/60s was removed. Marble pillars were revealed and restored, as well as tiled walls with **medallion portraits** in relief (of Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Burns, Scott, Horace and Macaulay). The sculptor was a Mr B. Creswick of London.

The roof is divided into segmental arches, each composed of a mosaic in red, buff, grey, blue and green hexagonal bricks with golden bosses. There are fewer **green tiles** than other colours, possibly because the green ones were more expensive!



*Bust of the Greek poet, Homer*

The gold ceiling bosses which are open-ended were part of the original **Victorian ventilation system**. Originally the room was lit by 72 incandescent electric lamps.

**Staircases** The stone staircases have a polished and moulded, wide handrail of marble, with **stone dogs** or heraldic beasts carved at the top and bottom of flights. The pillars on the staircase are made of 380 million-year-old (Devonian) coral reef, and **coral fossils** can be seen in them. On the second landing just before the Arts floor are Devonian **marble seats**. Here, you can see the heads of Chaucer, Lamb and Shakespeare and two unnamed others carved in stone just above eye-level.



*Can you find this mysterious beast guarding one of the stairwells?*