

# History of THE MITCHELL

The Mitchell Library, with its distinctive copper dome, is one of Glasgow's most famous landmarks. Founded in the 19th century, the Library is now the hub of a citywide information service.

When Stephen Mitchell - a wealthy tobacco merchant in Glasgow - died in 1874 he left the bulk of his estate " to the Town Council to form the nucleus...of a large Public Library in Glasgow... Books on all subjects not immoral shall be freely admitted ... and no book shall be regarded as immoral which simply controverts present opinions on political or religious questions."

The original Mitchell Library, which opened in 1877, had a temporary location in Ingram Street in the city centre but by the mid 1880s was beginning to outgrow its location. New accommodation became available when the Town Council moved into the new City Chambers and the Library took over premises in Miller Street. However, The Library soon encountered problems with lack of space for both books and readers. The situation became more problematic after the Library received a substantial bequest of rare and valuable items from the late Robert Jeffrey in 1902.

In 1904, the Corporation decided to erect a building which would allow for the continued growth of The Library and purchased a site with frontage on North Street. An architectural competition was held and plans by William B. White were chosen. These original plans were much amended before final approval was given; interestingly, these plans

appear to incorporate many of the best features of the unsuccessful designs.

The building's most striking feature, the copper dome over the main staircase, was added at this stage too, apparently after being suggested by a member of the Corporation rather than from the architectural competition.

The new Library was opened on 16 October, 1911. Primarily a 'closed access' library, in addition to the Main Reading Hall and a Magazine Room, rooms were also provided for the Glasgow Collection and the Scottish Poetry Collection and the Jeffrey Reference Library, complete with its specially carved bookcases.

The Library's recurring problem with space meant that an extension was begun in 1939. Building work was discontinued during WWII and this extension, along with a new Magazine Room, finally opened in 1963.

In 1962, the St Andrew's Halls was destroyed by fire, putting the adjacent Mitchell Library at considerable risk.

This potential disaster actually turned out to be a golden opportunity for the Library. After much debate it was agreed that the site could be used for a library extension and Edinburgh architects, Sir Frank Mears and Partners were appointed to prepare the plans. These plans proposed a move away from closed access stock towards a library of subject departments with a generous proportion of books on open access shelves.

The new extension was begun in 1972

and opened in 1981. The Mitchell Library now had the distinction of being, in terms of area, the largest public reference library in Europe. In addition to the public departments, the new extension contained a conference suite, coffee bar, theatre, offices and underground car park. The original façade of the St Andrews Halls, with its impressive statuary, became part of the new exterior.

In 1984 Strathclyde Regional Archives moved from the City Chambers into the Jeffrey Reference Library. They are now part of Archives and Special Collections Department. In 1994 the Robert Burns Collection and the Scottish Poetry Collection moved what is now known as The Burns Room on the first floor of the old building; this had once been the original Magazine Room.

In 2005 the Main Reading Hall, with its magnificent leaded glass ceiling and painted plasterwork, was turned into a permanent exhibition area. Library collections were now accessed from departments located in the Library extension. In 2006 library material other than Music items was made available for lending for the first time in the Library's history.

In 2007 redevelopment work took place to turn the old Mitchell Theatre foyer and bar into an impressive Surf Area with 50 public PCs, Leisure and Lifestyle for lending, the Herald Café and a state of the art Conference facility. In 2008, the Business and Media section opened on Level 1, with an emphasis on electronic information resources.

