



Case information

Case ID	300017400		
File Reference	HGH/B/LA/346		
Name of Site	Central Library, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh		
Local Authority	City of Edinburgh Council		
National Grid Reference	NT 25624 73449		
Designation No. (if any)	LB27587		
Designation Type	Listed Building	Current Category of Listing	B
Case Type	Amendment		
Received/Start Date	31/08/2015		
Decision Date	28/07/2016		

1. Decision

In our current state of knowledge, the Central Library, Edinburgh continues to meet the criteria for listing. The statutory listing address and the listed building record has been amended. The category of listing has changed from B to A.

Previous Statutory Address	George IV Bridge, Edinburgh Central Public Library, including Balustrade, Gatepiers, Gates Lamp Standards and Railings
Amended Statutory Address	Central Library, including Balustrade, Gates, Gatepiers and Lamp Standards, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The Central Library, Edinburgh was listed at category B on 14/12/1970. The building is located within the Old Town Conservation Area and the Edinburgh World Heritage Site.

2.2 Development Proposals

A proposal to build a large hotel extension to the Category A listed India Buildings on Victoria Street on a vacant site fronting the Cowgate, and adjacent to the Central Library, have recently been approved.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The Central Library, Edinburgh was visited on 25/11/2015. The exterior and interior were seen at this visit.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

The building was found to meet the criteria for listing. An assessment against the listing criteria was carried out. See **Annex A**.

The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 2, pp. 51-53.

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/>

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Listing Criteria*

Central Library, including Balustrade, Gates, Gatepiers and Lamp Standards, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh

1. Description

Designed by Sir George Washington Browne from 1887-90 with a 1901-3 bookstack addition, the Central Library is a multi-storey purpose-built Carnegie public library building with its principal (east and south) elevations arranged as tall upper floors and attic which are level with George IV Bridge. Its lower service floors are set below the bridge. The building is Greek-cross in plan and is largely in the French Renaissance style of Francois Premier. The upper floors are constructed in polished ashlar (Stirlingshire or Northumberland stone) with elaborately carved panels and ornate stonework and the lower floors are coursed bull-faced sandstone with polished dressings. The openings have roll moulded surrounds and chamfered mullions and transoms to the windows. The windows of the upper floors are flanked by giant Corinthian pilasters. The building has a tall pavilion-roofed, square-plan tower over the centre with triple pedimented dormer windows and topped by a 2-stage octagonal lantern. There is a bookstack (1901) wing at the northwest corner and the north and east walls are white glazed brick.

To the east elevation there is an arched bridge with a stone balustrade that links George IV Bridge to the main entrance, which is at the centre of a triple round-arched arcade with Diocletian windows. The entrance door is 2-leaf, timber and glazed and there is a large carved panel above with the inscription 'LET THERE BE LIGHT' over rising rays. Flanking the entrance are tripartite windows with Doric colonnettes with carved panels above. The upper floor windows (to the Reference Library) have elaborate carved apron panels, each with a roundel with a coat of arms depicting the City of Edinburgh, Scotland and the Royal Arms. Above these windows is a modillioned cornice and stone balustrade. The bay to the left has a smaller window breaking the eaves with an elaborate pediment.

The main stair case wing at the northeast corner projects forward to the line of George IV Bridge, and there is a circular and domed turret on an octagonal base and decorative scrolled brackets in the re-entrant angle. The ground floor of the staircase wing has a tripartite window to the centre with Doric colonnettes, below a panel with 3 heraldic low reliefs and a Diocletian window above this. The flanking bays have single windows with decorative pediments. The attic window has an elaborate Mannerist aedicular surround. The roof is steeply pitched and piended.

To the south (Cowgate) elevation, to the outer right, there is a decorative panelled 2-leaf timber door in a round-arched surround with a pedimented doorpiece with an oculus (small round window) in the pediment. To the outer left is a 2-leaf timber panelled door in a pilastered and corniced surround. The top storey (the Reference Library floor) has a deep cill course with small round windows and to the right is a

gabled bay with an elaborate Mannerist pediment with the inscriptions 'AC', 'ELP' and '1889'.

The interior was seen in 2015 and comprises a lending library opposite the entrance, a former newspaper room (with mid-20th century mezzanine) on the lower level, and a reading room above the lending library. The lending library, reading room and main staircase retain much of their late 19th century ornate plaster and timberwork. On entry there is a rectangular columned vestibule with a compartmented ceiling, aligned north to south, joining the main staircases in the building. The dog-leg staircase to the south of the plan leads to the lower ground floors - the Edinburgh Room (the mezzanine) and the Scottish Library (former Newspaper Room), and further down to the Cowgate entrance. The door architrave to the Scottish library is 17th century and roll moulded with the inscription 'AT HOSPES HVMO'. There are glazed tiles to the walls of this staircase at basement level. The Scottish library has a compartmented ceiling supported by eight ionic columns and ionic pilasters to the corners. The bookstack has floor to ceiling loadbearing timber shelving and cast iron spiral staircases.

Directly opposite the main entrance is the lending library, which has oak panelling to the walls and squared oak columns supporting a compartmented ceiling with egg and dart corning. The entrance has a pedimented doorpiece with a broken apex. To the right of the entrance is a wide, processional half-turn (Arbroath or Carmyllie) flagstone staircase with landings, square oak pillars and handrail. On the north wall is a bust of Andrew Carnegie in a shell niche with a corniced and pilastered surround, and below this a later door to the fine art department. Framing the top floor windows on the staircase is a round arcade on square Corinthian columns. The plaster cornice includes the initials 'AC' and there is a compartmented ceiling with pendants. The door architrave to the Reference Room is 17th century and roll moulded with the inscription 'TECVM HABITA 1616'. The reference is arcaded with giant Corinthian pilaster on deep bases and scrolled keystones. There is a pierced shallow central dome, with a geometric pattern and decorative plasterwork. Behind the arcading are tall bookshelves with a cast iron gallery accessed by four cast iron spiral staircases hidden in the corners of the Greek-cross plan.

There is small-pane glazing in timber sash and case windows, with small leaded panes to principal windows. The roofs have grey/green slates and there are decorative ashlar chimney stacks with corner pilasters and dentilled cornices; circular stacks.

At George IV Bridge there is a stone balustrade and a pair of square ashlar gatepiers with elaborate cast iron standard lamps. The cast and wrought iron gates, designed by Thomas Tait (of Edinburgh), are very decorative with thistles, symbols of Edinburgh, and the initials 'EPL'.

2. Assessment Against the Listing Criteria (HES Policy Statement, 2016) Annex 2, pp. 51-52

Criteria for determining whether a building is of 'special architectural or historic interest' for listing under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/9/contents]

To be listed, a building need not meet all the listing criteria. The criteria provide a framework within which judgement is exercised in reaching individual decisions.

2.1 Age and Rarity

Designed in 1887 by George Washington Browne (1853–1939) and opened in 1890, the Central Library is one Scotland's first Carnegie Libraries, which were endowed by the famous Scottish industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919). It was the first public library to be built in the city, some years after the first Public Libraries Act of 1850 was extended to Scotland in 1853. The commencement of building public libraries after this Act was relatively slow up until the turn of the 20th century because the act effectively introduced a tax burden on local authorities.

On 16 November 1886 the Town Council elected a committee to manage the building of the library. This committee considered various sites in the city for the new library, including one on Chambers Street and the Lawnmarket, but the George IV Bridge site was chosen for its central location and its low price. It was proposed that a library on this site could hold 187,000 volumes (compared to 74,000 in Leeds, 58,000 in Newcastle, 54,000 in Dundee). The site was enlarged by the purchase of a portion of the site behind India Buildings. This allowed the library to be self-contained and provided plenty of light.

The design of the library was the result of a competition sponsored by the Town Council in 1887. The council recommended that the library was arranged with a lending library at the entrance level of George IV Bridge and a reference library above, and the newspaper room below. The competition brief stipulated that the library was to be a grand building of any style and the principal rooms should have plenty of light, with the windows at a height to maximise the walls for shelving.

Browne's entry labelled 'Bibliotheque' was selected from 32 submissions and was published in *The Builder* (16th July 1887), just a few days after Carnegie laid the foundation stone for the building at a ceremony on Saturday 9 July 1887 (a non-working day was chosen on purpose to allow a large attendance). The building was to cost £35,000.

The library was officially opened on 9 June 1890 in a ceremony led by Lord Rosebery (Carnegie was not present), and opened for use on 16 June. It was an immediate success with 1,428 books issued on the first day of opening and by the end of the first year 44,774 registered readers. Such success required more space and by 1896 the Library Committee agreed that additional accommodation was needed.

To respond to the changing needs of the library there have been three significant periods of change to the building. Although part of Browne's original scheme, the book store wing to the northwest was not constructed until 1901-1903. It cost £6,000

and was designed to store 125,000 as well as a magazine room. The book shelves were loadbearing, specially designed to support the weight of the floors.

The second significant change to the building took place in the 1930s. Known as the lift and loft scheme, a new passenger lift was installed in 1930/31 to improve access to the loft above the main stair, which was used as the Edinburgh Historical and Topographical Library. In 1934 the Highland Society headquarters building, which adjoins the central library to the north (at 9-9A George IV Bridge) was converted for use as the Junior Library, Fine Art Library and additional storage. This building is listed separately at category B (LB27592). This phase of work did not have a significant degree of impact on Browne's library, with only a couple of openings made in the north wall to connect the two buildings internally.

The third significant change to the library came from 1957-61 and affected the former Newspaper Library. As people increasingly read newspapers from home the use of this room was reduced and was moved to 9-9A George IV Bridge. To increase accommodation in this room a mezzanine floor was added and offices were created in the east section of the room. More recently some changes have been made to the entrance hall and lending library, by the removal of barriers and replacement of the large lending desk, to improve access. Reinforcement work to the lower floors of the book shelves is currently ongoing following the collapse the loadbearing bookshelves.

The foundation of the public library system as we know it today began by the passing of the Public Libraries Act of 1850, which was extended to Scotland in 1853. Although subscription, collegiate, and private libraries existed from as early as the 16th century, the Act established the new concept of the public library, free for everyone, to be funded by from local taxation. In practice, however, it was unsatisfactory and as late as 1878, only six burghs had adopted it and four (including Edinburgh) had rejected it. The introduction of the Act met strong opposition as rate payers felt that local taxes were already burdensome and there was no lack of books available from circulating libraries, Mechanics institutes or churches.

The funding and building of public libraries relied heavily on the donations of philanthropists, most notably the industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who was, according to the previous listed building record, responsible for the endowment of over 2,500 public libraries throughout the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The first Carnegie funded library or Carnegie library, was opened in his hometown of Dunfermline, Fife in 1883 (listed at category B, LB25979) and this began the most significant period of public library construction in Scotland, with over 70 libraries built between 1883-1914.

One of Carnegie's early benefactions was £50,000 for Edinburgh Central Library, and this is the only Carnegie library in Edinburgh, compared to Glasgow which has 13 and Dundee which has 6. Edinburgh's branch libraries were funded by the publisher and inventor of the rotary printing press, Thomas Nelson, although it should be noted that the 1904 Corstorphine library was supported by Carnegie but was only taken into the city's jurisdiction in 1920. Glasgow's largest library, the

Mitchell Library which was built in 1906-11 (listed at category B, LB33095), was not endowed by Carnegie but rather by the local tobacco merchant, Stephen Mitchell.

Libraries are an important part of Scotland's educational and social history and they are among our finest public buildings. Libraries which are listed range from early examples that predate the 1850 Act, such as Wanlockhead Village Library (LB17192), or important civic architectural complexes, such as the Paisley Museum, Art Gallery and Library (LB39025), Playfair Library which is part of Old College (LB27989), or the Signet Library (LB27709) and Advocates library (LB51179). Later examples which are of notable quality and survive in predominantly in their original form may also be listed such as Inglis Memorial Hall in Edzell (LB11261).

At the time of its construction Edinburgh Central Library was one of the largest and best detailed examples of a public library in Scotland, and is early in a United Kingdom context. It remains one of the busiest lending libraries in the country. It is among the earliest Carnegie libraries in Scotland and because of its relative lack of alteration, its scale and its architectural quality both to the interior and the exterior, it is considered one of the best late 19th century and Carnegie libraries in Scotland.

2.2 Architectural or Historic Interest

Interior

The building's principal interior spaces – the reference library, lending library and a wide processional staircase between them – remain largely as designed with bold classical detailing and outstanding plaster and timberwork throughout. The reading room retains its cast iron galleries containing upper level bookshelves (which are accessed by hidden spiral staircases set within the corner piers). The walls are pilastered and the coffered domed ceiling is particularly fine. The main change to the reference room has been the loss of the screening wall to the ladies section at the east arm of the Greek cross plan and the room is now accessed by a single entrance (the original Ladies entrance).

The changes that have been made to the lending library reflect the social change in library use. In Browne's design the lending library was 'closed access' with a counter around the walls to separate the public from the books (which were held in bookcases on the arms of the cross plan. Books were requested from staff and the availability of books was recorded on the Cotgreave Indicator. This arrangement was the norm for lending libraries at this time, however the introduction of open access libraries commencing in the last decade of the 19th century gradually rendered such systems obsolete and the design of closed access lending libraries consequently had to change. At Edinburgh the counter has been removed (before 1929 as it is not evident in a photograph from this date) and the Cotgreave Indicator has been removed but otherwise the fixtures and fittings of Browne's late 19th century scheme largely survive.

The most significant change to the interior is to the former newspaper library (now Scottish library and Edinburgh room). A mezzanine was added between 1957 to 1961 and offices to the east of the plan, the effect of which is to block light to this library from the George IV Bridge light well, a key consideration in the design of the

building. The original tiling, from Broseley in Shropshire, on the walls has been removed, with only a portion of it surviving to the door architrave. The newsroom frieze inscription has been reinstalled on the staircase to this part of the building.

Also of interest and pointing to the history of the area are two 17th century doorpieces which came from a house previously occupying the site, belonging to Sir Thomas Hope, Lord Advocate in the time of Charles I (as shown in a sketch in MacGibbon and Ross p 489). The one on the main staircase has the inscription 'TECVM HABITA 1616', which roughly translates as 'Keep your own counsel' or 'Be true to yourself' and is from the 4th Satire of Persius. The one at the entrance to the Edinburgh and Scottish Library, near the basement is inscribed 'AT HOSPEM HVMO' which translates as 'but (I am) a stranger on the earth' which is also an anagram of Thomas Hope.

Plan form

The interior and plan form of a library was an important design consideration and was dictated by the location of the building. The primary concern was for the maximum amount of light and double height spaces with tall windows were typical devices to provide enough light. The walls were often left free of ornamentation to provide space for book shelves.

Early public libraries were highly compartmentalised and typically required a reference room, newspaper room, lending room, ladies and juvenile room, and lecture room. Some of these functions commanded higher status than others and this was reflected in the positioning, size and architectural treatment of the rooms. The reference room was the most important as it was the reserve of 'serious scholars' in comparison to the newspaper room. Therefore the reference room was typically the most elaborately decorated and usually on the upper floors, as can be seen at the Central Library.

The original competition brief for the building largely dictated the main arrangement of rooms. However, Browne's Greek-cross plan form was innovative for its time and made the best use of the constricted site. This plan form greatly extends the available wall spaces as well as providing circulation spaces and ancillary rooms in the corners of the plan. The hierarchy of these internal spaces is expressed by the roof pattern, with steeply pitched and ornamented roofs over the library and main staircase and smaller roofs to the corners. Each library can extend across the whole width of the building with tall windows to each elevation to provide the appropriate level of light, and the light levels in the reference room are increased by the large domed skylight over the centre. In Browne's drawing, tables are shown in the middle of the library rooms, so that the walls could be devoted to bookshelves and could be easily accessed by staff.

After the addition of the bookstack in the early 20th century the footprint of the library remained unaltered, and is shown on the 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1908. As noted in 'Interior' above the most significant changes to the plan form have been the mid-20th century changes to the former newspaper room.

Technological excellence or innovation, material or design quality

The end of the 19th century was a period of stylistic eclecticism for large public commissions and not one single architectural style dominated. At the time of building

this library was the largest public library commission in Scotland. Browne's design in the Francois Premier idiom is outstanding and appropriate for a large public commission. The confined site with a substantial change in height between the Cowgate and George IV Bridge is very challenging which Browne's skilfully addressed.

Other buildings in Scotland designed in the Francois Premier style are the Partick Burgh Halls (LB32852) and Craighouse in Edinburgh (LB27736). Browne also used it later in his doorpiece for the former British Linen Bank on the High Street in Edinburgh (LB23489).

The facades above the level of George IV Bridge have a wealth of ornate stonework including numerous carved panels to the east elevation. The turret to the angle between the library and the main staircase wing is the only major change to the exterior design from Browne's competition scheme. With the exception of the loss of the decorative pinnacle to this turret, the exterior of the library is almost completely unaltered since it was built. The building is more plainly detailed to the levels below George IV Bridge, however the ornate detailing found above is hinted at the lower levels by the decorative door architraves. Uniformity is achieved by the window pattern, overall creating imposing elevations to all streets.

A particular concern of the Library Committee was to maximise light, and the committee commented on a deficiency of light to the newspaper room in Browne's scheme. As a result this library was moved further away from George IV Bridge with the entrance accessed by a small footbridge (in Browne's original scheme only a small flight of steps are shown). This had the effect of creating a lightwell to the east wall of the newspaper room, so it could be lit from all four sides. The newspaper room was also heightened and consequently the floor level of the lending library above was raised requiring two steps at the entrance.

Consideration was also given to the structure of the building and an article in the Edinburgh Evening News of 8 November 1887 states that the building was to be lined with Portland cement with cement floors supported on steel girders, so the building was fire and damp proof, a major concern for library buildings.

Carnegie's endowment did not extend to the design and planning of library buildings until the early 20th century, when designs required approval from Carnegie's private secretary, James Bertram, who was in charge of administering the funding. In 1911 he produced a pamphlet "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings" which provided advice on the planning of the building but did not specify a preferred architectural style or require that Carnegie was directly referenced in the design. Prior to this much input and research was required by the chosen architect.

Libraries were often designed by local architects and a handful of architects were slightly more prolific and known to have designed more than one, often competing against each other in library competitions. George Washington Browne (1853-1939) was a prolific library designer, known to have designed five public libraries: Jedburgh (1898) (Category B, LB35486), Annan (1906) (Category B, LB21068), Bo'ness Town

Hall and Library (1901) (Category B, LB22397), Castle Douglas (1902) (Category B, LB49671), and Kelso (1905) (Category B, LB35708). He also prepared completion entries for the Library for Solicitors to the Supreme Courts of Scotland (or Signet Library) in 1888 and Ayr Library in 1891.

The Central Library was a landmark in Browne's career, establishing him in independent practice and leading to a host of commissions across Scotland and he also published a paper on the 'Planning of Public Libraries' circa 1890. Browne was a renowned 19th century architect and was recognised as such when he was knighted in 1926. In her article 'A Profile of George Washington Browne' Mays describes the library as follows: "The choice of the Francois Premier style and dexterity with its vocabulary, combined with the successful planning, places the library among Browne's outstanding achievements' (p.55).

Setting

The library is situated in a key position in the centre of Edinburgh's Old Town and in close proximity to a cluster of outstanding public buildings and libraries, including the National Library of Scotland, the Advocates, Signet and Old College libraries. Because of its scale and high quality design it is an imposing building in the streetscape of both the Cowgate and George IV Bridge, and its principal elevation with small bridge and gates is very distinctive.

Regional variations

There are no known regional variations.

2.3 Close Historical Associations

This building is significant historically in its connection to Andrew Carnegie, and it is one of the earliest examples of a Carnegie Library in Scotland. Whilst it was not a requirement for Carnegie funded libraries to directly acknowledge him in the design, it was common for many to do so. At Edinburgh there is a bust of him, by Scottish sculptor Charles McBride and the initials 'AC' feature in the plaster cornice above the main staircase, and these initials are also on the south elevation of the building, along with 'EPL' (Edinburgh Public Library) and the date '1889'. The motifs of his personal bookplate, the sun's rays and the bible verse 'Let There be Light', are above the main doorway (see Other Information).

3. Working with the Principles of Listing (HES Policy Statement, 2016) Annex 2, pp. 53

In choosing buildings within the above broad headings particular attention is paid to:

- a. special value within building types*
- b. contribution to an architecturally or historically interesting group*
- c. the impact of vernacular buildings*
- d. authenticity*

When working with the principles of listing the Central Library, Edinburgh has particular interest under a, b and d

- a. The Central Library is among Scotland's most significant library buildings. It is one of the largest and earliest examples of a public library in the country.
- b. It is a significant public building in the heart of Edinburgh's Old Town, and in close proximity to a cluster of other significant public buildings which are also libraries, including the National Library of Scotland, the Advocates, Signet and Old College libraries.
- d. The exterior of the library is almost completely unchanged since the book stack was added and the interior retains a significant proportion of its late 19th century layout and fine plaster and timberwork throughout.

4. Summary of Assessment Against the Listing Criteria**

Designed in 1887 by the renowned architect Sir George Washington Browne and opened in 1890, Edinburgh Central Library is an outstanding public library building in Scotland, as well as among the earliest Carnegie libraries. It remains one of the largest purpose built libraries in the country. Since the book stack was added in the early 20th century the external appearance with ornate carved stonework is almost completely unaltered. Internally the quality of the details in the main rooms and circulation spaces is outstanding. Its innovative Greek-cross plan form is also of special interest. The alterations and extensions that have been made to the building have responded to the changing requirements of users and the growth of the collection and it remains one of the busiest lending libraries in Scotland.

In our current state of knowledge it continues to meet the criteria for listing

5. Category of Listing

Categories of listing are non-statutory and buildings are assigned a category (A, B or C) according to their relative importance following the assessment against the criteria for listing.

Category definitions are found at: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/what-is-listing/>

Category A denotes buildings of national or international importance, either architectural or historic; or fine, little-altered examples of some particular period, style or building type. It is proposed that the category of this building should be changed from B to A as it is among the best examples of this building type in Scotland and therefore of national significance.

6. Other Information

Various sources, including James Mackay's "Little Boss: A Life of Andrew Carnegie" (p.255), indicate that Carnegie stipulated that the main doorway should have the

sun's rays and the bible verse 'Let There be Light' (these motifs were on Carnegie's personal bookplate). However it is unlikely that this was a condition, or it was not consistently applied. The majority of Scottish Carnegie libraries do not have this decoration, although it is found at Dunfermline, Edinburgh, Motherwell and Kelso.

7. References

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* This assessment is based on our current state of knowledge and has been prepared for the purpose of consultation or to provide a view on the special interest of a building. This assessment is a consultation document and will form the basis of any new or updated listed building record should the structure be listed. The content of this assessment may change to take into account further information received as a result of the consultation process.

** A building may be found to meet the listing criteria but in some circumstances may not be added to the list. See 'When might Historic Environment Scotland list a building' at <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/what-is-listing/>