

# Gorbals Library, Glasgow

## Project Detail

### “Gorbals Hits a New Lending Curve”



There was an age when the trams and books were inextricably entwined such as when the Glasgow Corporation (Tramways, Libraries) Act, 1899 gave the city powers to provide a public library service supported from the rates. Initial plans were to build eight libraries at a cost of £100,000 but following a gift of that amount from Andrew Carnegie a further seven were immediately planned. Carnegie had left the Broomielaw in Glasgow with his family 52 years earlier and in that time he had amassed enormous wealth. Gorbals Library was the first public lending library to be opened in Glasgow on November 11, 1901. However, it soon outgrew its accommodation and it was replaced by a new library in Norfolk Street in 1933.

Last June saw yet another chapter materialise in this area with the opening of a library and learning centre by First Minister Jack McConnell. For CRGP it marked the end of an interesting project in which they worked alongside Curious Oranj who had been commissioned to create a design for the 21st century. Tom Crombie, a director of CRGP and architect in charge of the project, faced an unconventional design strategy. "The interior was not what you would imagine a library to be. It is modern, hi-tech and is more about computers than books. Its purpose is all about being a learning centre than a library and it educates people in the use of IT," he said.

The library certainly aims to help people access the internet and become computer literate so that they may become more employable as well as being able to participate in the pleasures of surfing the net. Essential to the plans for the building and its adaptability for future use was the need to create a flexible interior that could be changed to suit whatever configuration might be required. This flexibility had to be built in to how the facility was serviced particularly in terms of lighting and the IT infrastructure.

CRGP showed its expertise in management by being in attendance as practical people with a client who was trying to push the boundaries forward in terms of libraries and an interior designer who was trying to push the boundaries forward in terms of how the space was going to be distributed and how it was going to be used.

"It was necessary to keep people's feet on the ground in some respects. And to try to keep the job within budget and ensure that what was proposed was practical and achievable and more important, useable," said Tom.

The job has now been completed and the library and learning centre is functional. In its first month of opening, the centre attracted 30,000 visitors and loaned 13,000 books.

At the opening ceremony, the First Minister said: "Learning is not just about sitting in a classroom or lecture theatre. It is about seeking out opportunities to better yourself, to learn new skills and to reach your true potential. This is something that everyone deserves the opportunity to do - and bringing learning into the heart of communities breaks down many of the barriers that prevent people from doing so."

The new centre is supported by the Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise and Glasgow City Council, Gorbals Social Inclusion Partnership, Glasgow College of Nautical Studies, Gorbals Initiative and Gorbals Community Forum.



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