

## **Library of Birmingham – Birmingham, England, U.K.**

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The Library of Birmingham is located in Birmingham, England. The project was commissioned by the Birmingham City Council to replace the old Central Library that was in the center of the city. The final building by Mecanoo, a Dutch architecture studio, and Buro Happold, was designed to be a central gathering place for learning, culture, and information. The original library was regarded as one of the busiest libraries in England, but it was no longer suitable for the quantity of foot-traffic it was receiving. The new 39,000 square meter library welcomed over 2.7 million visitors in the first year of operation. The Library of Birmingham is said to be the largest public library in Europe today. The building's history, circular geometry, and excellent BREEAM rating are all major components of the construction and architecture of the Library of Birmingham.

The top floor of the structure houses the Shakespeare Memorial Room. The room is enclosed by a golden oval, as seen in the image below. In 1879, the original library that housed a large portion of Shakespeare's collection burned down. Afterwards, the Shakespeare Memorial Room was built in the 1882 Victorian Library. The same room was dismantled, stored, and then reassembled atop today's Library of Birmingham.

The combination of rotundas and the complex geometrical façade is an ode to the circle. Mecanoo's page on the Library of Birmingham says, "The building is an ode to the circle: an archetypal form that embodies universality, infinity, unity and timelessness." The repeated circles encasing the building create intricate shadows through the halls of the library, as intended by Mecanoo. Simultaneously, they are a reference to Birmingham's rich history of contrasting heavy metalwork and fine gold and silver of the Jewellery Quarter. The interior floors are a series of overlapping rotundas connected by elevators.

The Birmingham City Council communicated strong goals for the sustainability of the building to Mecanoo and Buro Happold. The Library of Birmingham now has a BREEAM Excellent rating. Buro Happold achieved this rating because of its integrated use of natural daylighting and ventilation. The building effectively uses the summer and winter solar angles to provide shading and solar warming. The overlapping circular floors create a chimney effect to expel used air and drive fresh air intake through the floors. A gray water recycling system has also been implemented throughout the building, as well.

Mecanoo designed the Library of Birmingham with the user interface in mind throughout the whole process. The historical references, design elements, and sustainability goals all are intended to create an easy and enjoyable experience for the millions of visitors each year.

## References

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