**Queen Victoria (1819-1901)** was the daughter of Edward, Duke of Kent, and Princes Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld. She succeeded to the throne of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in June 1837 and reigned until her death in January 1901. She was declared Empress of India by the Conservative government of Benjamin Disraeli in 1877. Victoria visited Leeds in September 1858, to officially open the new Town Hall. She stayed at Woodsley House, home of the mayor of Leeds, Peter Fairbairn, whom she knighted during her stay.

This memorial statue of Queen Victoria by George Frampton was erected by limited subscription and unveiled in 1905. It originally stood outside Leeds Town Hall before removal to its present site on Woodhouse Moore in 1937. The statue was less a celebration of Victoria’s own personal achievements than of her status as chief representative of the nation and its empire. This is reinforced by the symbolism of the statue’s plinth and pedestal, the latter bearing the words ‘India’, ‘Australia’, ‘Canada’ and ‘Africa’ as a reminder of the British empire’s global reach. The plinth was originally flanked by bronze figures representing ‘Peace’ and ‘Industry’, though ‘Industry’ is now in store awaiting repair. Victoria herself is portrayed in her coronation robes, originally holding the orb and sceptre.

The statue represents an idealised view of the Queen and, by implication, the Victorian period. During her reign, Britain became the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world. However, the era was also marked by huge inequality at home, and imperial conquest and exploitation overseas. At the time of Victoria’s visit to Leeds in 1858, the brutal suppression of a major rebellion against British rule in India was still underway. The statue’s imperial connotations have recently made it a source of controversy.