Theological Libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland

70 Years of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries

EDITED BY CHRISTINE LOVE-RODGERS, HANNIE RILEY, AND GUDRUN WARREN

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Introduction

The Work of ABTAPL

CHRISTINE LOVE-RODGERS

*T*he genesis of this book project came with the recognition of the Association for British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL)'s 70th anniversary in 2026, and a plan by Hannie Riley to celebrate this with an open access monograph volume. We began by inviting proposals for chapters on the work of ABTAPL, and more broadly on theological, religious and philosophical libraries in the UK. We were looking for chapters exploring the development of libraries in this sector since the foundation of ABTAPL in 1956, the current situation of libraries and librarianship in this field, and the challenges and trends that the sector will face in the future. We actively sought contributions from libraries and librarians of all religious faiths (and none), and from all areas of the UK. We are indebted to all our chapter authors for stepping up to write and responding to the editorial process, and we are grateful to our publishers, Atla, for being ready and willing to support our idea and to transform our content into a monograph volume. A special note of thanks is due to Rob Bradshaw, whose project to digitise the *Bulletin of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries* provided a vital resource enabling research into ABTAPL's past for this volume.

Intellectually, this volume follows on from earlier work published in *Theological Libraries and Library Associations in Europe: A Festschrift on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of BETH* (Kenis et al. 2022). This work included important chapters from ABTAPL members on theological libraries in England, theological libraries in Oxford, and the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide. We are pleased that *Theological Libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland* celebrates the regionality and diversity of British and Irish theological libraries, exploring their strengths and differences throughout the UK and Ireland. Because we are the Association of Theological and Philosophical *Libraries*, we have leaned into libraries as the focus of this volume, even though many of our libraries contain archives and some of our members are archivists. For recent insights into the UK and Ireland's rich religious archival collections, see the 2024 special issue of the *Journal of Religious History* (Irving-Stonebraker and Pattenden 2024).

We are proud of the resulting book, which is a celebration, a reflection, and call to action for ABTAPL, for all it has achieved and can achieve. The chapters by Riley and Smith-Blow illustrate how ABTAPL's impact has ranged from the global to the individual. Personal connections and experience have been critical to building ABTAPL and forming its work. The unique challenges of a theological librarian's role in today's information environment are highlighted by Williams and Sinnett-Smith, exploring the challenges of building and managing theological collections. The fact that theological librarians are frequently found in small libraries where they are solo librarians adds further dimensions to these challenges. A fascinating theme that emerges is the relationship between a librarian's role and their religious ministry. We read in Warren's "Theological Libraries: A Cathedral Perspective" about the ministry of hospitality that librarians exercise in welcoming library visitors for events, exhibitions and library study, and in his chapter on "Buddhist Libraries in the UK," Garcia Jane also notes an affinity between librarianship and monasticism, with librarians becoming monks and vice versa. The chapters on theological libraries in Ireland (Conkey and Collins) and in Scotland (Love-Rodgers) explore the evolution of theological libraries through the period that ABTAPL has been in existence, charting both new growth and the challenges of libraries faced with closure. Gale and Fitzpatrick, although from very different perspectives, both explore the complexities of digital delivery for faith-based materials, and the need for librarian expertise to manage the fast-changing world of digital platforms, digital archiving, and open access.

As editors we are also very conscious of the stories that have not been told. Some of these are stories for which we sought but could not find authors, such as a chapter on recent changes to Catholic libraries in the UK, including the great Catholic libraries of Heythrop College and Ushaw College (however, see Purcell 2025). We also reached out for, but could not obtain, a chapter on theological libraries in Wales, and a chapter on Islamic libraries. In the course of writing and editing this volume, we've been reminded of many other stories that could be told about theological libraries in the UK. These include the story of theological libraries in London, the city at the heart of ABTAPL's operations when it began in 1956 (Powles 2020). The two ABTAPL Guides (Lea and Jesson 1986; Kerry and Cornell 1999) detail public libraries as holders of theological and religious library collections, but the recent history of religious collections in UK public libraries remains an under-researched area. Also mentioned in the ABTAPL Guides are library collections for religious education in teacher training colleges and schools. They have played a notable part in the tale of the UK's theological libraries, but their story is yet to be written. We hope that this volume will be followed by further publications on these topics and more.

At the beginning of this journey, we knew there was a book to be written, but we did not yet know what that book could do. We were delighted as editors to receive chapter proposals from such a diverse range of authors. It was exciting at author meetings to hear how this project had led our authors to carry out new research, to have new conversations and make new connections. As a result of those conversations, chapter authors have gone on to speak about their project in other forums and shared ABTAPL's work with new audiences. ABTAPL has gained new members and, following publication, we hope it will gain more.

The ABTAPL Committee consists of members representing the range of our association's work. I speak from my role as Deputy Chair, appointed in 2025. Winette Field is Training Rep from 2018 to 2026. Richard Johnson is Honorary Editor of the *ABTAPL Bulletin*, appointed in 2016. Marni Thurm is Honorary Secretary, appointed in 2021, and oversees ABTAPL's communication activities. Sarah Mann is former Conference Secretary and current Digital Officer, appointed in 2021, and maintains the ABTAPL Union List of Periodicals. Keith Lang is Membership Secretary and Treasurer, appointed in 2023. In the next part of this introduction, I pass the baton to these current committee members to tell their stories of the work they do for ABTAPL.

Training

WINETTE FIELD, TRAINING REPRESENTATIVE

Training for ABTAPL has taken more of a centre stage since 2019. The core autumn and spring meetings had long been established with a speaker programme and member-led sessions operating annually. However, the autumn meeting had seen a decline in the number of delegates, some institutions were reluctant to fund conference attendance, learning outcomes grew in importance, Covid-19 prevented travel and video conference technology became ubiquitous.

These factors led Winette Field to spearhead a change in practice, introducing a training needs survey, which uses CILIP's Personal Knowledge and Skills Base (CILIP 2025) terms, and post-event evaluations. Looking to the future, the next stage will be to create a flexible cycle for the core training needs, particularly important as a growing number of members have been in post for three years or less. Indeed, there has been much discussion about feelings of unpreparedness by new staff for the full extent of their roles in the sector despite undertaking Master's level study. To meet this need, individual mentoring was introduced by Sally Gibbs, former Chair, and this allowed established working librarians and recent retirees to support others.

Practical changes to formal training include events offered online, a wider range of trainers – including individuals from the NHS, authors, UKeiG[1] and Naomi Hart, Heythrop library, a member of the CILIP 125 next generation of leaders – resource lists, an ABTAPL eBook collection, and communities of practice (COP). During the COP, participants read a best practice article, discuss it, and reflect on their experiences. At best, these provide the opportunity to talk about problems and receive feedback from colleagues who might have solutions. Sometimes people share tools they have used within their workplace.

Recently, continental colleagues have been invited to attend events. This complements work done by Hannie Riley, as Chair, with both BETH and collection development within overseas libraries. Take-up has been low, but seeing overseas library workers raise issues such as changes to the Dewey Decimal System's treatment of religion within the 200 schedules has been heartening.

2024 saw the first joint Religious Archives Group (RAG) and ABTAPL meeting (Religious Archives Group 2025). Ruth McDonald, RAG Chair, Archivist and Deputy Director of The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre, had already participated in the Spring Conference as

part of a discussion panel. Together, the two groups put on an autumn face-to-face event at St Paul's Cathedral, London, entitled Fundraising for Archivists and Librarians.

In the skills survey, face-to-face events always appeal to members due to the networking and relational opportunities which arise from them. These meetings remain a challenge, however, as many solo workers find it hard to get away from their workplace. Hybrid events may be a solution, but much relies on the venues chosen for the in-person aspect for this to occur and at present, many places are set up for streaming in but not out.

The secondary issue of funding member training has been addressed by ABTAPL's small grant project, which provides funding for courses, transport, and other CPD needs. Applicants are not restricted to ABTAPL-only events but can apply for a free place at the spring conference if required.

Overall, the training aspect of ABTAPL is in a strong, responsive place, and this can only benefit the sector and the profession as a whole.

The ABTAPL Bulletin: A History

RICHARD JOHNSON, HONORARY EDITOR

ABTAPL was founded in 1956, and the first Bulletin was published in November of that year. The aim of ABTAPL was

> to bring together librarians working with or interested in theological and philosophical literature in Great Britain. Its purposes were to improve the bibliographical information available, to bring to light some of the little-known collections on these subjects, and to help the smaller libraries that lacked professional expertise... In my opinion, the Bulletin is not only the evidence, it was also the success of ABTAPL... It achieved, in varying degrees, all the three purposes mentioned. (Howard 1974)

Twenty-four issues were published between 1956–66, edited from 1956 to 62 by Reginald J. Hoy (SOAS) and from 1962 to 66 by Jennifer Statham (King's College). I have been unable to see copies of these issues, so we have to rely again on John Howard's article for a description of what they contained:

> It published a long series of articles describing theological libraries in London and other parts of Britain, it carried notices of bibliographical

and reference works, and there were features on professional matters like classification (of theological libraries, of Indian religions, and of the Dead Sea Scrolls) and the national library system and inter-library lending. It also carried organizational news, announcements, reports of meetings, and other notices for members. (Howard 1974)

In 1966, Jennifer Statham had to relinquish the editorship, and with few active members and a lack of leadership, there was no one able to replace her. For a number of years, ABTAPL was in the doldrums; John Howard writes, "The importance of the Bulletin to the Association is shown by the fact that with no Bulletin there was virtually no Association" (Howard 1974). The reasons he gives have a contemporary feel to them:

> Many libraries in small theological colleges and seminaries do not have the funds to support a full-time qualified librarian . . . [and] the large general libraries, national, university and public, have substantial collections but few are organized on a subject basis which allows qualified staff to devote themselves particularly to these fields. (Howard 1974, 14)

However, in the early 1970s, under John Howard's leadership, the fortunes of ABTAPL began to revive. The "New Series" of the ABTAPL Bulletin was first published in 1974; numbers 1–40 being published from 1974–87, followed by volume 2, numbers 1–18 (1988–93), and volume 3, numbers 1–9 (1994–96). From volume 4 in 1997, each year had a different volume number, reaching volume 32 in 2025.

Over the years, due to the development of email and the internet, the content of the Bulletin has gradually evolved to meet new situations, although there is much that is recognizably the same. We still include important news about the Association, and book reviews, but not the more ephemeral items, such as lists of periodicals on offer. There is no longer the need to communicate basic information about different libraries that can easily be found on the internet; but we do still seek to provide ideas and resources for (especially) solo librarians in smaller libraries "to help the smaller libraries that lacked professional expertise," in the words from 1956.

ABTAPL conferences increasingly focus on areas of professional development, and the Bulletin provides space for reports of such conferences and enables the speakers to publish their talks in a more permanent form as articles, which functions as a resource for those who were unable to attend the conference or hear the original talk.

We still encourage librarians to write articles about their special collections, or events hosted by the library, or to share with others in ABTAPL how they have dealt with difficult situations – most notably in recent years, the Covid pandemic. More than anything else, the Bulletin seeks to provide the opportunity for ABTAPL members to share with one another both good ideas and good practice, and to be a key part of the networking between members.

In conclusion, here is a list of the Bulletin editors since 1956:

> 1956–62: Reginald J. Hoy
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> 1962–66: Jennifer Statham
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> 1974–87: John Howard
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> 1987–91: Patrick J. Lambe
>
> 1991–92: Alan Smith
>
> 1994–2008: Marion Smith
>   (with Andrew Lacey as co-editor 1994–96)
>
> 2008–10: Humeyra Ceylan Izhar
>
> 2010–15: Jayne Downey
>
> 2016–present: Richard Johnson

Communication Activities

MARNI THURM LI, HONORARY SECRETARY

As ABTAPL exists primarily to facilitate the sharing of information, experience and advice, and support between its members, the ABTAPL website is a hub for advertising our activities. It is the primary platform for sharing with the public and potential members the history of the association, all the benefits of membership, the latest conference updates, and is home to the members' portal where CPD materials are hosted.

The ABTAPL Jiscmail (JISCM@il 2025) is where day-to-day knowledge sharing happens. For solo librarians or those working in a small team, the ABTAPL Jiscmail has often helped a frustrated or bemused information professional by serving as the equivalent of turning to

a colleague nearby to ask "Is it just me?" or "What do we do when…?" providing timely insight, advice and support. Like our North American and European counterparts, as a forum for discussing the latest trends, tech, or how worldwide events affect our local services, the Jiscmail proves itself to be a lifeline.

ABTAPL maintains a presence on relevant social media platforms as a way of advertising its activities beyond the membership to individuals who might benefit from joining, as well as other organisations and businesses. Presently, ABTAPL remains active on X and LinkedIn, as well as a Facebook group.

ABTAPL Union List

SARAH MANN, DIGITAL OFFICER

ABTAPL maintains a union list of its member institutions' journal holdings online at *https://abtapljournals.wordpress.com*. A union list – "A complete list of the holdings of a group of libraries of materials (1) of a specific type, (2) on a certain subject, or (3) in a particular field" (ODLIS) – offers value for researchers because it is more efficient to search this one resource than to search separately the catalogues of different member institutions. For the same reason, it is a valuable tool for ABTAPL member librarians. ABTAPL operates an interlibrary loan system for member institutions; the union list ensures that member librarians can quickly find which collaborating institutions hold relevant material, and few member libraries share their catalogues elsewhere (for example, most ABTAPL member libraries do not contribute to the Jisc National Bibliographic Knowledgebase). From 2022 to 2024 the site has averaged more than 350 visitors per year, an indication of its ongoing value.

The Role of Treasurer and Membership Secretary

KEITH LANG, TREASURER AND MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

In ABTAPL, the role of treasurer and membership secretary is combined, which helps to keep things more efficient. The role requires careful precision, diligence, and diplomacy. A sense of history is always present in the details when working with the membership database.

As ABTAPL is defined as a membership association, there is no tax or charity status, and it is a pleasure to be able to seek and give opportunities to our membership through the accumulated funds.

Because it is a detailed and careful role, it is challenging to clear space to perform these duties without interruption, so I choose to do it outside of my paid employment in the world of theological librarianship. Others might find it easier, but to ensure my volunteering remains within my own capacity, I find this approach works best for me. The time spent on this endeavour is for our common good, and I perceive this ethos is shared by all of our committee members. For me, this is a continuing source of positive inspiration even on days when I don't feel like doing the necessities!

On the financial side, we benefit from the goodwill of others. Our accounts are audited by a highly qualified accountant for free; he professes joy in being able to do so. For the best part of a decade, as far as our current electronic records show, we benefit annually from a very large Atla donation, which comes via BETH, based upon the number of our members subscribing to Atla products. Atla and BETH could also be described as membership organisations in the United States and Europe, respectively. At our conferences, we receive sponsorship from a range of companies associated with the library world. While reimbursing committee member expenses, this personally underscores the amount of goodwill there is in ABTAPL in time and personal effort.

On the membership side, I really enjoy contact with so many colleagues across the philosophical and theological library sector (although the philosophical element is no longer a notable characteristic reflected among current membership, but was more so back in the 1950s). Our range of library membership starts with individuals who have an interest in, or who are part of, small organisations not able to pay the institutional fee or who have worked in and retired from this work and calling, through various and eclectic medium-sized institutions, right up to colleges and specialist and faculty libraries in institutions whose names are known all around the world.

As the intention of our association is, so is my experience in this role, that of mutual benefit. Being treasurer and membership secretary means I interact, even if only briefly, with so many colleagues, so that when I go to the ABTAPL JISCMAIL email forum, reading and posting, I have a context that imbues each interaction with more meaning. This is especially heightened for me by interacting in person at conferences, approving small grant awards, and occasionally sharing our benevolent fund with members in need.

Your Role?

CHRISTINE LOVE-RODGERS, DEPUTY CHAIR

These stories from our committee members shine a light on the valuable and dedicated work they do to make a difference to the profession through ABTAPL. Our members are the past, present and future of ABTAPL and any member can step up to join the committee, bringing their own unique experience and skills to ABTAPL's future. I would like to end this introduction by inviting you to take up the invitation written fifty years ago by former ABTAPL Chair John Howard. He said, "This discussion of the future of ABTAPL in the light of its past is enough to be going on with. What you have to do now is to decide what part you are going to play in the Association, put pen to paper, and tell any of the committee members" (Howard 1975, 16).

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Notes

1   "The UK e-information Group (UKeiG) – formerly known as the UK Online User Group (UKOLUG) … is now a highly respected special interest group of CILIP," *https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=201314&id=692156*.

ABTAPL's Global Impact on Theological Libraries

Extending the Shelves

HANNIE RILEY

*C*ontrary to what its name might imply, the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL) has, since its inception, never confined its influence and impact to Britain alone. Instead, one of the defining characteristics of the Association throughout its 70-year history has been its outward-looking vision. It has extended its interests globally, both on a personal and organisational level.

This is because commitment to international collaboration was part of ABTAPL's DNA from the very beginning. In fact, the Association, founded in 1956 (Howard 1974, 12), was "originally intended to be the British section of an international theological libraries organisation sponsored by UNESCO and IFLA" (Howard 2006, 20) and grew out of early efforts to create an International Association of Theological Libraries (IATL) in the 1950s (Powles 2022, 520):

Roger Thomas[1] and others of the SCOTAPLL [Standing Conference of Theological and Philosophical Libraries in London] committee were involved in 1955 in the formation of an IATL [International Association of Theological Libraries]. IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) and the World Council of Churches Study Department had given the initial impetus. It was hoped to produce a Bulletin of Current Theological Literature and an International Bibliography of Books on Religion. Enthusiasm waned when the cost of the operation was realized and IATL never had an effective existence. ABTAPL was, however, founded to be the British national section of this international enterprise. (Howard 1975, 15)

True to its founding story, ABTAPL has long served as a support network for theological and religious studies librarians within the United Kingdom and its reach has extended "beyond" the UK (Powles 2022, 520; 2009b, 115). Members of ABTAPL have consistently sought to extend their shelves beyond their own borders, supporting theological libraries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America with generosity, humility, and a spirit of partnership. Through these efforts, ABTAPL has become instrumental in promoting theological education by standing in solidarity with libraries facing serious material and structural challenges in the Majority World. These partnerships are often forged through personal relationships, cross-cultural networks, and a shared vision of equipping theological leaders, biblical scholars, and students around the globe. It is a story of relationships built across continents; of mentoring offered across generations; of practical help given with care and sensitivity; and of a deep conviction that theological education must flourish in every corner of the world.

Therefore, this chapter traces the various ways in which ABTAPL has served as a trusted network for theological and religious studies librarians globally, demonstrating a remarkable commitment to supporting libraries within the international theological education sector. It highlights how ABTAPL members have supported theological libraries internationally: by providing resources, offering professional mentoring, supplying financial assistance, sharing teaching and training, building a stronger international network, and advocating for global library development.

Publications

One of ABTAPL's major projects, which has had the strongest international impact, is publication. There have been four notable publication initiatives. First, *The Bulletin of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries,* which was regarded as the heart of the association by Howard (1974, 12–13), long-serving Chairman and the *Bulletin* Editor in the 1970s and 80. Second, a comprehensive directory of theological libraries, *Handbook of Theological Libraries*, taking over 20 years to compile (19) published as *A Guide to the Theological Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland* (1986), then extended as *Guide to Current Literature in Religious Studies* (1990). Third, *Union List of Periodicals* (1988, 2000) compiled all journal lists of member libraries; and finally, *Guidelines for Theological Libraries* (1990).

The *Bulletin* documents the development, content, and impact of all initiatives, along with later reflections on their significance. The literature guide project, together with ABTAPL's directories of theological libraries and *the Union List of Periodicals* (1988, 2000), eventually migrated online as a live directory in the 21st century (ABTAPL Journals, n.d.). *The Guide to Theological Libraries* became a key reference work, updated in print in 1986 and 1999, and it set the pattern for the Association's ongoing service to theological libraries worldwide. These tools became foundational references and are still cited in academic contexts, including recent works such as the *Festschrift for the 50th Anniversary of BETH*, published by Brill (Powles 2022, 522–523). The development and international impact of each of these publications will be discussed more in the following sections.

Bulletin *(1956–present)*

The *Bulletin of* ABTAPL has been a cornerstone of the Association's communication and professional development efforts since its inception in 1956.

ABTAPL was founded to bring together librarians working with or interested in theological and philosophical literature in Great Britain. Twenty-four issues of the *Bulletin* were published between 1956 and 1966. After a period of abeyance, the *Bulletin* was revived in a New Series, volume 1, by John Howard in 1974.

As ABTAPL developed links with global partners like BETH, Atla, and theological colleges in the Global South, the *Bulletin* emerged as

both a record of ABTAPL's activities and a forum for scholarly and professional discussion, driven by a clear need to facilitate regular exchange among theological librarians beyond its UK roots. It was particularly important before digital revolutionary media and digitisation were fully normalised, as it became a vehicle for recording and amplifying these communications amongst international librarians in the analogue era. By the 1990s, "The *Bulletin* now has a circulation of about 270 copies, with about a third of that number in Europe, North America and the Commonwealth" (Lambe 1990a; see also ABTAPL 2006, 19; Smith 2001a).

Almost every *Bulletin* has records of these international activities, whether they are about reflections on overseas association conferences (Hall 2008, The Norwegian Forum for Theological and Religious Studies Libraries) such as IFLA, Atla, BETH, ANZTLA (Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association), ForATL (Forum of Asian Theological Librarians), ITLA (Indian Theological Library Association), Norwegian Forum for Theological and Religious Studies Libraries and KTLA (Korean Theological Library Association); reports on a visit to overseas theological libraries and their collections or vice versa (Shire 2008; Sewell 1986, 17–18; Williams 1981, 2–3; Andrews 1987); reports from theological book distribution organisations (Berends 2009, 27; Arnison 2013, 19–20); articles or letters from overseas librarians (Sogenbits 2002, 8–12; Murphy 2002, 13–15, Stitzinger 1979); introducing libraries or librarianship in different countries (Izhar 2009; Doibhlin 2002); announcement of Notice Meetings and Theological Library Association Newsletters Received; or Minutes of the BETH Assembly. The *Bulletin* volume 2, number 1 was mostly devoted to the Asian situation (March 1988). A press release about Atla's appointment of a new executive director was made in the *Bulletin* (ATLA 2011). After the millennium, fewer regular news items, minutes and announcements from Atla and BETH made way for the *Bulletin* with the development of digital communications and websites, but the reflections about international conference attendance continue today.

Also, the *Bulletin* documented book donation schemes, such as those facilitated through ABTAPL members in collaboration with agencies like the Theological Book Network, discussed more in a separate section. These reports provided transparency and built solidarity with under-resourced theological libraries worldwide.

Moreover, the *Bulletin*'s open access availability via Theology on the Web, an open access theological resource website, significantly extended its global reach. Institutions and individuals across the

world can now consult ABTAPL's archives without barriers, making them a rare and valuable resource in an era of subscription-heavy academic publishing.

One particular volume of the *Bulletin* has noted a lasting influence globally. The June 2006 Golden Jubilee edition (vol. 13, no. 2) exemplified its international connections, celebrating ABTAPL's 50th anniversary and tracing the association's development since its founding, highlighting milestones such as the formation of BETH and close partnerships with Atla (then ATLA) (Norlin 2006, 15; Powles 2006, 16) and ANZTLA (Smith 2006b, 9). It lists 200 institutional members: 30 from the United States, two from Australia, two from Belgium, one each from Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Canada, Lebanon and New Zealand (ABTAPL 2006, 16-19). Notably, circulation and outreach extended well beyond Britain, about one-third went to libraries in Europe, North America, and the Commonwealth.

Throughout the *Bulletin*, many attempts to introduce diversified resources from different continents or countries were made by sharing perspectives from across cultures. The reprinted work of Humeyra Ceylan Izhar introduced Turkish perspectives on libraries and the information society (2009). Other features included Steven Runciman's essay on the ancient Christian libraries of the East, and Joan Humphreys' reflections on library cooperation in North America, highlighting shared challenges and emerging digital possibilities (1978, 14–16). Gorman's South African contributions to *Theological Bibliography* were informative and eye-opening (1981, 13–16; 1978, 13–16). Such contributions affirm the *Bulletin*'s role in broadening dialogue and visibility across the global theological library community.

One of the most inspiring and enduring aspects of ABTAPL's work today is its quiet yet steady contribution to the growth of theological libraries that serve communities, equip leaders, and advance scholarship in some of the world's most challenging contexts through the *Bulletin*.

Directories

Apart from the *Bulletin*, the first publication referred to is a directory. ABTAPL's push for a directory manifested through various formats rather than a single volume. Initiated in the 1960s by incorporating selected book lists and bibliographic essays in the *Bulletin*, it was driven by experienced theological librarians like Plumb, Walsh, and Howard.

The *Guide to Theological Libraries* became a keystone reference, and *the Union List of Periodicals* eventually migrated online as a live directory.

Handbook of Theological Libraries

According to Alan F. Jesson (1986, 10), the idea for the Handbook of Theological Libraries was first discussed in 1962, when Jennifer Statham, then editor of the ABTAPL Bulletin, proposed "a comprehensive survey of library resources" as a cooperative project.

However, the initiative stalled in favour of compiling a union list of theological periodicals and it was not until 1965, when Philip W. Plumb and a group of library students began visiting theological libraries under a small research grant, that the handbook project began to take shape (Howard 1974, 15). Once again, there was another pause: "Between 1966 and 1974, the Association went into a state of hibernation," and "Work on the *Handbook of Theological libraries*, as the project was then known, continued but slowly" (Jesson 1986, 10). In 1972, a major data-gathering push by Plumb yielded 250 responses (Jesson 1986, 10). Also the revived ABTAPL *Bulletin* of December 1974 announced that compiling this handbook was in progress, indicating its anticipated practical value for the community (Jesson 1986, 10; Howard 1974, 15).

Recurrently, despite repeated appearances on general meeting agendas and minimal progress through the late 1970s and early 1980s, the *Bulletin* in March 1984 noted the Handbook project needed "considerable updating if the work is to be of any value" (Elliott 1984, 1). This delayed project was eventually resurrected by the persistence of the ABTAPL Committee, particularly Michael Walsh (Jesson 1986, 11). A breakthrough came when Emma Dennis, a Master's student at Loughborough University, took on the development of the handbook as her dissertation project (Jesson 1986, 11; Elliott 1984, 1). After her successful submission, Walsh reported its arrival in 1984, needing only "a little light editing" (Jesson 1986, 11). The completed volume, now titled *A Guide to the Theological Libraries of Great Britain and Ireland*, was finally published in 1986 (Jesson 1986, 12).

A Guide to the Theological Libraries of Great Britain and Ireland (1986)

Jesson, who edited the final volume, later reflected that the guide had a "22-year gestation period" but offered "a very usable" and much-needed resource for the field (1986, 12). It was reviewed in the November 1986

Bulletin No. 1.37 by A. J. Walford, who highlighted its scope, saying "[it] is a very worthwhile publication for its detail, scope and price. It deserves to be on the shelves of all reference libraries worth the name" (Walford 1986, 12).

> The guide contains nearly 400 entries arranged in alphabetical order of town. Where the library has responded to the questionnaire sent out by ABTAPL, the entry includes full postal address, telephone number, name of librarian or officer in charge, history, organisation and function, details of any special collections, size of stock, classification system, catalogues, indexes and publications. For libraries which have not replied such information as is known from other sources is given. (ABTAPL Publishing 1987, 18)

The directory project was a collective ABTAPL effort and a significant evolution of the original handbook idea, benefiting from over a decade of data-gathering and editorial work. This guide served essentially as a directory, listing theological and religious studies libraries across the UK and Ireland and providing details on their specialisations, holdings, relevant information and services. Therefore, it became a useful reference for librarians and researchers to locate theological collections, especially for interlibrary cooperation, resource sharing, and guiding users to research collections. In an era before online catalogues, a printed guide of libraries filled a critical information gap. It also allowed smaller or more specialised collections to be known to the wider community. For ABTAPL members, the directory complemented the *Bulletin*'s regular "Libraries" feature (which profiled individual libraries) by providing a broad bird's-eye view of available library resources.

The directory was envisioned as a tool to aid librarians overseas. The *Guide* would enable seminary librarians abroad to identify partner institutions in the UK, or seek advice. Moreover, many overseas theological colleges had limited bibliographic resources; having a directory of major theology libraries (especially one for a modest cost) could help them connect with sources of scholarly materials. ABTAPL provided a form of support to theological librarians in the Majority World, who often relied on such networks for research materials. ABTAPL members saw this as part of their mission of sharing information and experience internationally.

Guide to Current Literature in Religious Studies Collections of Great Britain and Ireland (1999)

ABTAPL recognised the urgent need to support theological librarians, particularly those in smaller or under-resourced institutions, with tools for navigating the rapidly expanding field of religious studies publishing. A major initiative reflecting this concern was a bibliographic project, *Guide to Current Literature in Religious Studies*, first reported in the *ABTAPL Bulletin* no. 10 (Elliott 1977b) and formally announced in November 1977 at that year's AGM (Elliott 1977a) and June 1978 issue of the *Readers' Guide to Books on Religion and Philosophy* by Mary Elliott (1978, 2).

> Mr. Walsh and the other Working Party members had assembled a list of about 150 titles, discussed the arrangement of the Guide and were about to enter into a contract with Mansell Information/Publishing Ltd. The co-operation of other members in annotating the titles for inclusion was being sought, as well as in tracing titles in further relevant subjects. The scope is not limited to indexing and abstracting journals and regularly published bibliographies; "Hidden bibliographies" in specialist periodicals being particularly sought for inclusion. Both English and foreign language publications are to be included, and the aim is international and interdenominational coverage. (Elliott 1978, 2)

The focus of these literature guides was to spotlight recent and noteworthy publications like books, bibliographies, and periodical indexes of high utility "in any related subject area" (Elliott 1977b), a spectrum of religious studies, encompassing English and foreign language sources alike. As Elliott (1978, 2) noted, "Currency is the key criterion," a statement that encapsulated the project's driving ethos: relevance and immediacy for the practising theological librarian.

This was confirmed by Mary Elliott (Elliott 1980,2) in the *Bulletin*, volume 1, number 19, indicating ABTAPL's interest in international cooperation and bibliographic resource sharing. Providing lists of recommended new books was part of that support system in tandem with gathering the overwhelming flow of new theological and religious publications into a manageable, curated list for librarians. Its goal was to assist librarians, especially those in smaller or overseas institutions, in navigating new publications in the field in order to help librarians make informed acquisition decisions.

In 1999, a new edition of this directory, *Guide to Theological and Religious Studies Collections of Great Britain and Ireland*, was compiled

by David A. Kerry and Evelyn Cornell, reflecting the continued importance of keeping such a directory up to date. By 2000, just over one third of the copies of the *Guide* had been sold (Smith 2000, 7). It provided location-based access to theological collections and was later made available online (ABTAPL, n.d.-b). This complemented the role of bibliographic guides, helping librarians know not only what to acquire but where resources could be found.

Overseas librarians found this particularly valuable. Specifically, to librarians with limited budgets and little access to bookshops or scholarly reviews, the *Guide* would serve as a trusted acquisition tool. Receiving curated lists from ABTAPL (either in the *Bulletin* or as a separate book) meant they could prioritise important titles. This was one way in which ABTAPL "shared information and experience" with global partners, aligning with its mission (ABTAPL, n.d.-a). This endeavour greatly supported theological librarians abroad by filtering the current literature down to relevant resources. In this way, the *Guide to Current Literature* acted much like a modern collection development newsletter, highlighting recent and noteworthy titles for informed library purchasing and collection building, distilling the vast output of publishers into a manageable selection.

Union List of Periodicals *(1988, 2000)*

"The new committee of ABTAPL, following the resolutions of the Annual General Meetings of 1972, 1973 and 1974," proposed a possible compilation of the British Union List of Serials in Religion (Howard 1974, 15).

> Work on a union list of theological periodicals was also begun in 1964. A preliminary list of about 500 titles agreed by the committee was prepared and bibliographical checking and the inclusion of the holdings of the first three or four libraries by Miss H. Cuthell had been partly completed when work was discontinued. It is proposed to re-examine the need for such a list and the possibility of its compilation in reasonable time and at reasonable cost. (Howard 1975, 13)

Eventually, the *Union List* was launched in 1988, in partnership with the Bible Society. It aimed to consolidate information on periodical holdings across theological libraries in the UK, creating a centralised reference tool for locating serials in theology and philosophy. For several years, the list was compiled and maintained by Bible Society staff until Evelyn Cornell took over in the late 1990s as ABTAPL's

designated editor of the *Union List* (Smith 1997, 3). The list's development depended on regular contributions from member libraries. By 2000, 41 institutions were participating, and this number had grown to 47 by 2005 (Smith 2005, 2).

A significant milestone in its global impact was the transition from print to online access. After discussions in the late 1990s, the *Union List* was made available on the University of Leicester's website[2] by 2001 (Smith 2005, 2; Smith 2001b, 4). This greatly enhanced accessibility for users worldwide, enabling scholars and librarians outside the UK to consult holdings data remotely and in real time. Currently, it is available on ABTAPL's own website.[3]

The *Union List* became a model of interlibrary cooperation, facilitating resource sharing and cataloguing collaboration. Furthermore, it offered a structured way to locate theological journals across multiple institutions, expanding access and reducing duplication, a valuable contribution to the field. For scholars, particularly those in institutions without comprehensive theological holdings, the list enabled more effective interlibrary loan requests and widened the range of periodicals that could be used in research. Hence, the Union List served as a pioneering example of subject-specific, collaborative bibliographic control so the initiative was well-received internationally, especially for libraries in the Majority World. The *Union List* was advertised in the *ANZTLA Bulletin* issues no. 34 (1998, p. 21) and no. 48 (2002, p. 4).

Guidelines for Theological Libraries *(1990, 2008)*

1990 issue

According to Lambe (1990b), a volume of the *Guidelines for Theological College Libraries* was published in a special consultation issue of the *ABTAPL Bulletin* in June 1990, recognising the diverse nature of theological libraries, and was the result of nearly two years of careful development by a dedicated working party.

It is worth noting that ABTAPL did not intend to impose rigid standards on members. Rather, it meant to offer adaptable recommendations that could be tailored to individual institutional contexts. "Each college will need to assess what is possible and practical within the constraints of its own situation" (Gibson et al. 1990, 2). By providing a flexible yet comprehensive framework, it has enabled theological libraries to assess and enhance their services, addressing the shared needs of theological libraries while recognising the diversity of institutional contexts

The development of *Guidelines* was shaped from the beginning by a spirit of mutual exchange and global partnership. Although it was originally devised to support theological colleges in Britain and Ireland, the working party drew from a broad spectrum of national and international influences. Key among these was the draft version of the guidelines produced by ANZTLA, which had been approved by the Australian Library Association. These external models were studied carefully alongside UK-specific frameworks, such as those for Colleges of Higher Education, enabling the ABTAPL team to produce a document that balanced best practice across various educational and ecclesiastical contexts (Lambe, 1990b).

The formulation process was further enriched by feedback and commentary from overseas colleagues. While individual contributors were not named, the acknowledgements in the final document underscore the value of international engagement, confirming a shared global interest in the project (Gibson et al. 1990, 1). *Guidelines* thus emerged not only as a national resource but also as a product of thoughtful international collaboration. The inclusion of insights from practitioners beyond the UK ensured that *Guidelines* were truly formed by a diversity of professional experiences and institutional models.

This connection was not one-sided. *Guidelines* have had a broader impact overseas. They impacted practices in theological libraries across Europe, North America, and the Commonwealth, contributing to a shared understanding of quality and professionalism in theological librarianship. The *Guidelines*' emphasis on adaptability has allowed them to be relevant in various international contexts, accommodating differences in institutional size, funding, and mission. In later years, the baton was carried by updated guides and reference compilations (both within and outside ABTAPL) that continued to serve the same purpose: keeping theological libraries well-informed and well-stocked with the latest important works.

2008 Issue

The ABTAPL committee discussed creating a comprehensive guide for member libraries to establish clear standards for library services. This was pursued during the time of the Association's Golden Jubilee in 2006 (Smith 2006b, 9).

The project came to fruition in early 2008, when *Guidelines* was finally published as an official ABTAPL publication in the *Bulletin* (2008) volume 15, number 1, heralded as a "long awaited" and

"exciting new venture" for ABTAPL (Reekie 2008, 5). Carol Reekie and Michael Gale were the principal contributors to the booklet, which was issued as a modestly priced pamphlet at £5 in 2008 (Reekie 2008, 5; Gale 2017). The primary purpose was "to set out guidelines for the provision of library services in colleges involved in theological education and training" (Reekie 2008, 5).

It provided a benchmark for best practices in areas such as library operations, including collection management, information technology, information literacy, staffing, library cooperation and library management, collection development, user education, equipment, library development, finance, and cooperation.

Most notably, *Guidelines* found eager readers in non-Western contexts. It was not only circulated among British and European institutions but also was actively shared with libraries in the Global South. A report in the *Bulletin* of ABTAPL (Berends 2009, 27) described how the Theological Book Network, an organisation dedicated to equipping theological schools in Africa and Asia, partnered with ABTAPL to distribute the *Guidelines* abroad. Kurt Berends, the Network's Executive Director, praised the "good work ABTAPL did in producing *Guidelines*", noting that multiple copies were being shipped to theological colleges and seminaries in Ethiopia as well as to institutions in Kenya, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. He reported that news of the *Guidelines*' inclusion in library aid shipments had been "enthusiastically received" by recipient schools (Berends 2009, 27). *Guidelines* served as a much-needed framework for developing library services providing a template that librarians and administrators in theological colleges (often operating with limited resources) could consult when evaluating and upgrading their own libraries. This kind of adoption illustrates how a set of standards conceived in one context (Britain) was adaptable and relevant internationally, offering a model that could be translated into different educational and cultural environments. In summary, *Guidelines* achieved a significant standing both at home and overseas. They encapsulated ABTAPL's decades-long commitment to improving theological libraries, providing a concise yet comprehensive benchmark for library operations.

Book Donation: From Surplus to Service

Another ABTAPL form of international support has been the provision of theological books. "Over the years, so many ABTAPL member libraries have closed, been dispersed, or been merged with other collections" (Smith 2006a), but demands for theological books from the Majority World have grown as "The decline of Christianity in the Global North is now being outpaced by the rise of Christianity in the Global South" (Jurlo et al. 2020, 9). Hence, recognising the acute scarcity of academic books in many Majority World institutions (Lambe 1987, 13), ABTAPL members frequently organised book drives, donations, and shipments. As early as the 1970s, ABTAPL had proposed a cooperative acquisition scheme for regional Christian council publications from Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Howard 1975).

This support has been carried out from multidimensional angles. One dimension involves financial support enabling the shipping of materials, the donation of printed books, or the provision of digital resources. The other dimension is the commitment of both individual members and partnership with other organisations.

Sourcing the physical books might be the easiest element of this support. Many theological libraries in the UK regularly face the need to de-duplicate, downsize, or rehome books due to space constraints or collection development policies (ABTAPL 1990, 13; James 2024, para. 1–4). Rather than allowing valuable theological materials to go to waste, ABTAPL members have consistently found ways to redirect these resources to where they are most needed. For example, CMS Library offered unwanted items in the *Bulletin* freely to any libraries (1979, 15–16). Therefore, over the decades, members have contributed to the donation of vast numbers of books to institutions across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. These donations have helped to seed new library collections, strengthen existing ones, and enable institutions in the Global South to offer better-equipped theological training.

The practicalities of resource provision often required creative solutions and the mechanics of donation have evolved. In the early decades, these efforts were often informal; librarians posted boxes to missionary colleges or packed crates for visiting scholars. In some cases, individuals personally carried books when travelling abroad.

Over time, more structured partnerships developed, often coordinated through charities, academic networks, or mission organisations

to secure shipping such as Books2Africa (pers. comm., March 2024), Book Aid Charitable Trust (Book Aid), Theological Book Network (TBN), Overseas Book Service (OBS) by Feed the Minds, 4 the World Resource Distributors and Langham International (Morgan 2005). Many pallets of shipments of books have been sent through these partnerships.

Everset and Sach (2012) from Feed the Minds wrote an article in the *Bulletin* to appeal for their cause. Feed the Minds was founded in 1964 from a campaign by Archbishop Donald Coggan to improve lives through education across Africa, Asia, and South America. Through its Overseas Book Service, it supported theological education by providing donated books to more than 120 colleges in the Global South and encouraged theological and philosophical librarians to contribute by donating requested books, publicising the service, assisting with cataloguing and storage, and helping to fund shipping costs (Everset and Sach 2012, 17–19). Unfortunately, "After 60 years of operation, Feed the Minds, a UK-based international development charity, announced its decision to close due to financial constraints" in April 2025 (Shrestha 2025).

Out of many organisations ABTAPL worked with, three notable charity names stand out most: TBN; Book Aid, where some ABTAPL members volunteer regularly; and more recently, smaller initiatives like Oxford Theology Resources Link (OTRL), which specialises in theological library support for the Majority World.

Theological Book Network

TBN enjoyed the longest history and strongest connection with ABTAPL until most recently. It was founded in 2004 in the United States to deliver high-quality theological resources to Christian educational institutions to strengthen the Majority World Church. By the late 2000s, ABTAPL's partnership with TBN became more structured. In 2009 alone, over 15,000 volumes were collected from the UK with help from ABTAPL members, contributing to the Network's shipment of more than 250,000 books to 380 institutions in 30 countries. Kurt Berends, Executive Director of TBN, expressed, "Many thanks to ABTAPL and its member institutions for their continuing support of our work" (Berends 2009, 27).

Further solidifying its logistical support, ABTAPL discussed a notable partnership with TBN. The idea of establishing a UK consolidation centre to gather and ship theological books to the Majority World displayed ABTAPL's awareness of global needs and its willingness to

engage in operational initiatives to meet them (Arnison 2013, 19–20). It showed a transition from ad hoc donations to organised, strategic and large-scale resource redistribution. The partnership between ABTAPL and TBN was strong.

In 2024, TBN officially became a part of the programme of Scholar Leaders (Scholar Leaders 2024; Watson and Hays 2024) and began engaging with ABTAPL to explore collaboration.

Book Aid Charitable Trust

In the *Bulletin of ABTAPL*, Richard Johnson, Honorary Editor of the *Bulletin*, mentioned Book Aid as one of the ways to dispose of unwanted or surplus books, while also introducing his new disposal method of selling them via Amazon (2012, 2). Additionally, long-serving former Honorary Secretary Anna James recommended Book Aid as a great place to donate unwanted materials in Church Times:

> Book Aid (not to be confused with Book Aid International) deals exclusively with Bibles and theological literature. By preference, these are redistributed to parts of the world where there are practical or political difficulties in acquiring Christian books. Books not needed for partner projects are sold second-hand in the UK, or, if damaged or infested, sent for recycling. Money raised from these sources help to pay shipping costs of materials sent overseas. (James 2024, para. 14)

One ABTAPL member, who is also a librarian at a small theological seminary, volunteers regularly at Book Aid, giving, sorting, and processing book donations (pers. comm., March 2024). This demonstrates how Book Aid's mission of resource sharing and theological education globally is appreciated amongst ABTAPL members. In spring 2025, Book Aid sent 10,000 books to a theological research library in Asia, curated by this member in partnership with OTRL, with ABTAPL contributing towards the shipping costs (pers. comm., March, 2025). Additionally, Book Aid is listed among the useful resources for members on the ABTAPL website, further highlighting the partnership.

Theology on the Web

In addition to physical book donations, ABTAPL has also supported digital theological resources. Rob Bradshaw, an active ABTAPL member

and former International Support Officer of the Committee, developed Theology on the Web, a digital initiative offering free access to thousands of theological books and articles.

His commitment to this project is remarkable. He sources materials, digitises them, and maintains the entire collection on his website. Many ABTAPL members contributed journals to strengthen this digital resource, and ABTAPL occasionally provided financial support to the project, recognising the growing importance of Open Access resources for theological institutions worldwide. The *ABTAPL Bulletin* is now freely available through Theology on the Web.

Oxford Theology Resources Link

A smaller, targeted initiative has also grown out of ABTAPL's ethos: Oxford Theology Resources Link (OTRL), a charity specialising in theological library support for the Majority World. OTRL's work focuses on carefully curating, shipping, and advising on theological resources, ensuring that libraries in Africa and Asia can better serve their students and communities (OTRL, n.d.-a).

Institutional member libraries such as the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies in Oxford, the Theology and Philosophy Faculties Library (part of the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford), Wycliffe Hall Library (University of Oxford), and Union School of Theology in Wales have donated large numbers of books for this initiative (OTRL, n.d.-d; pers. comm., Oct, 2024).

Additionally, ABTAPL has funded the shipping of theological books to four seminaries via OTRL over the past two years, through its large grants, which allocates £1,000 annually to support theological libraries in the Majority World. The beneficiaries of this scheme include the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary (UETS) Library in Kyiv (1,300 books); a research library in Asia (whose name and location are withheld for safety reasons) in partnership with Book Aid (10,000 books); Kumi University Library in Uganda (1,500 books); and Bethel Theological Seminary Library in South Sudan (1,000 books) (OTRL, n.d.-c).

The ongoing initiative between the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary (UETS) Library and ABTAPL via OTRL continues to flourish today, with regular shipping of books (OTRL, n.d.-b). UETS, a small institution in Kyiv, is striving to meet the needs of its students as they continue their studies and ministerial training to

support their war-torn nation, despite bombs shattering the library windows (Українська євангельська теологічна семінарія 2022). In response, ABTAPL member librarians from Oxford began collecting their surplus books, carefully curating a collection tailored to the UETS curriculum and faculty needs by allowing them to select titles from the donation list.

This project not only resourced the UETS Library but also strengthened the local community and its ability to serve their students' training for ministry. It stands as a living example of how ABTAPL's values, such as service, partnership, and respect for local contexts, continue to find expression today. ABTAPL is committed to covering the shipping of the books this year, as it has last year.

Beyond logistics, what shines through ABTAPL's contribution is its pastoral care. ABTAPL has been keen not simply to support sending books but to build up libraries and librarians that would truly serve students and faculty. Christmas gifts and handwritten cards from the ABTAPL member library community in Oxford were sent to the UETS community in December 2024, and the UETS academic dean visited Oxford.

These initiatives demonstrate foresight; while Western theological libraries enjoyed abundant resources, many newer theological colleges in postcolonial contexts struggled even to build basic collections (Arnison 2013, 19–20; Riley 2025, 201). However, ABTAPL's support was never about simply offloading unwanted books. Members increasingly emphasised the need for sensitivity to local curricula, linguistic contexts, and theological diversity as ABTAPL's aim has never been to impose, but to enable theological education to flourish on its own terms. Also, ABTAPL actively encourages dialogue with recipient institutions to ensure that donations meet genuine needs by careful curation and supporting indigenous theological reflection.

Global Networks

Theological librarianship thrives on relationships and ABTAPL has long been a hub of international networking and a bridge builder in the global theological library community. From its outset in 1956 as a network for sharing theological library resources and expertise, ABTAPL quickly cultivated international ties with sister organisations such as the International Theological Library Association (formerly ICI), Atla, ANZTLA, ITLA and ForATL, and has been an active member

of BETH. These international friendships have multiplied opportunities for collaboration and advocacy, helping to raise awareness of the needs – and strengths – of libraries across diverse global settings.

Two key pillars of ABTAPL's global engagement have been its partnerships with Atla and European theological libraries through BETH. These relationships, built over decades, have profoundly shaped ABTAPL's development, fostering mutual learning and advancing its mission of professional exchange.

BETH (Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie)

As early as the 1970s and 1980s, ABTAPL members actively exchanged resources and attended international meetings with BETH. Much credit is due to John Howard, whose dedicated commitment to international collaboration was particularly evident in his support for the *Conseil International des Associations de Bibliothèques de Théologie*, the European council of theological library associations. "Although ABTAPL was represented at the 1957 meeting, the *Conseil* was formed without British participation" in 1961 (Howard 1982, 11–12). This body, reflecting its evolving identity and European focus, was officially renamed BETH in 1998 (Geuns 1998, 7–8).

John Howard talked about his intention of joining BETH in the second *ABTAPL Bulletin* of the new series, "As soon as ABTAPL could adequately demonstrate its own existence, it could join this European international group, contribute to its activities and benefit from being associated with it" (Howard 1975, 16).

Smith acknowledged Howard's commitment: "John had a strong commitment of ABTAPL's relationship with overseas theological library associations, particularly the *Conseil International des Associations de Bibliothèques de Théologie*" (2009, 3). Powles also confirmed this saying, "John had always been a supporter of ABTAPL's links with Europe" (2009, 8).

Over time, what began as occasional visits and information exchanges evolved into a sustained collaborative network. ABTAPL became an active member of BETH, participating in its committees and contributing to BETH leadership with key figures such as Mary Elliott, Penny Hall and Marion Smith amongst others representing ABTAPL for many years (Powles 2022, 522). Currently, Hannie Riley, the Chair of ABTAPL, also has sat on the board as Vice President of BETH since 2021 (BETH, n.d.-a) as well as Christine Love-Rodgers, Deputy Chair

of ABTAPL, as one of the *BETH Bulletin* editors (Love-Rodgers 2025, 4). Representatives of each association have regularly attended the other's annual conferences, often reporting back in the *Bulletin*.

Furthermore, ABTAPL participated in joint projects such as the European Thesaurus for Indexing in Religious Libraries (ETHERELI) project and a multilingual theological thesaurus with ATLA (Smith 1999, 10). Judith Powles states that "John's help with BETH's ETHERELI project was just one of the ways in which this support was demonstrated" (2009, 8). ABTAPL was a strong supporter of this European network.

Moreover, ABTAPL hosted BETH gatherings. For instance, in the year 2000 ABTAPL combined its own annual conference with the 29th General Assembly of BETH, drawing librarians from across Europe and even North America in York (Smith 2000, 6–8). The 48th Conference was held in 2019 in Oxford (BETH, n.d.-b). Such events cemented ABTAPL's role as a bridge between British theological libraries and the wider European community.

Atla (American Theological Library Association)

Early *Bulletin* records reveal that collaboration with Atla has an equally long history, with numerous chronologically recorded exchanges, including visits and shared projects. Representatives of each association have regularly attended the other's annual conferences, often reporting back in the *Bulletin*.

In 1985, a delegation of Atla librarians toured libraries in Ireland and Great Britain in a landmark study trip co-organised with ABTAPL. Lawrence Hill's detailed account in the *Bulletin* captures the spirit of camaraderie and mutual learning that characterised this tour (1986, 4–9). "The ATLA tour of Ireland and Great Britain was an opportunity for everyone to travel hundreds of miles to see not only the countryside, towns, villages, the well-known cities, the cathedrals, etc., but especially the libraries" (Hill 1986, 4).

Hill noted that theological libraries were the focal point as the Atla visitors explored libraries ranging from "a national library, a public library, a convent library, a palace library, cathedral libraries, and denominational libraries and archives" (1986, 9). Hill observed key differences between British and North American practices, particularly noting the diversity, historical depth and curatorial care of British theological collections, contrasting them with American practices such as regular weeding. British libraries often retain materials indefinitely

as treasured holdings, enhancing their archival richness, despite some cathedral libraries having ceased active acquisitions (Hill 1986, 9). The tour highlighted the advantages of the UK's denser scholarly landscape, where a wide variety of theological libraries are accessible within a relatively small geographical area, a contrast to the vast distances between institutions in North America (Hill 1986, 9).

In the late 1990s, formal liaisons were established. Penelope R. Hall, an ABTAPL officer, served as the council delegate to ATLA (Powles 1998, 3), and she noted "a growing sense of the need for co-operation between ATLA (now Atla) and the Council" (now BETH) that would benefit theological librarianship "on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond" (Hall, 1998).

This spirit of partnership yielded concrete outcomes. For example, discussions between British and American librarians led to cooperation on an English-language theological thesaurus for Europe and US involvement in the ETHERELI library project (Smith 1999, 10; Powles 1998, 3). The synergy has also enhanced ABTAPL's capacity to serve its members. Through Atla, ABTAPL librarians gained access to American developments in library automation, digitisation, and consortia resource sharing, while through BETH they engaged with continental European perspectives and initiatives. These inputs have enriched professional practice in British theological libraries, keeping them abreast of global trends. ABTAPL's own mission "to help those working in theological libraries by sharing information and experience" (ABTAPL, n.d.-a) has been greatly amplified by its international alliances.

Likewise, ABTAPL members learned from Atla's initiatives. A 1985 *Bulletin* report by John Howard on Atla's ambitious "Project 2000" (a long-range planning project for theological libraries) observed that while American theological libraries operated on a scale "totally unfamiliar" to the UK, they faced familiar challenges in areas like budgeting, staffing, cooperation and computerisation (Howard 1986). Such insights proved that British and American theological librarians shared common concerns despite structural differences and could benefit from each other's innovations. Also, while ABTAPL has not formally participated in Atla's Task Force on Training for Theological Librarianship, its members have long shared a common commitment to professional development and international training initiatives (Stewart 2001, 15) and joined in an advisory capacity (Campion 2018, 11–12).

By the 21st century, ABTAPL was not an insular British body but part of a worldwide fraternity of theological library associations. Its

leaders explicitly recognise this fact. In 2018, Rachel Campion, the Chair of ABTAPL, affirmed in the *Bulletin* that "I was also keen to strengthen and develop ABTAPL's relationships with ATLA" (8) and BETH (14) and pledged to nurture these ties to "...make connections with others and to share experiences...between UK theological libraries and those around the world" (8).

More recently, a growing interest in "reciprocal partnerships" has emerged between Atla and ABTAPL (pers. comm., Gillian Cain, 2024)[4]. This reflects a maturing understanding of the global associations. This network has provided fertile ground for collaborative projects and grants, including the publication of ABTAPL's seventieth anniversary book as an Open Access resource through Atla Open Press, participation in Atla's 2024 global survey, and attendance at each other's conferences and networking opportunities.

In summary, the collaborative network with Atla and BETH has become integral to ABTAPL's identity and impact. Historically, these partnerships grew out of common professional interests and gradually formalised into enduring structures of cooperation. The nature of the collaboration is multifaceted, from joint conferences and exchange of publications, to shared projects and representation in each other's organisations. All are grounded in an ethos of collegial support. The contributions to ABTAPL's mission have been profound; thanks to Atla and BETH, ABTAPL members benefit from an international exchange of ideas and resources, ensuring that British theological libraries remain connected to broader scholarly and technological developments. This international engagement has enhanced professional standards and innovative practices within ABTAPL, while also allowing ABTAPL to contribute British insight to the global theological library community. ABTAPL's alliance with Atla and BETH over the decades exemplifies how working collaboratively, whether with other librarians or other professionals, is necessary for the delivery of library services in an increasingly connected world. The partnerships continue to enrich theological librarianship and uphold ABTAPL's founding vision of shared knowledge and mutual advancement.

Other Associations

ABTAPL has actively fostered international collaboration beyond Europe and America. Among these partnerships are the Indian Theological Library Association (ITLA) and the Forum of Asian Theological

Librarians (ForATL); both of which have contributed meaningfully to mutual learning, knowledge exchange, and the development of best practice in the profession.

In 2002, ABTAPL hosted Mr. Chacko Chacko, then Secretary of ITLA, during its annual conference in Chester (Smith 2002, 5). Chacko "suggested that exchanges could be arranged between libraries in India and Europe" (Smith 2002, 6). The positive reception of his proposal reflected a shared commitment to strengthening global library networks and mutual relationships. Hall also reported that she helped when ITLA "drew up the articles of their formal constitution at a meeting in Bangalore" (2023, 23).

ForATL was founded in 1991 in Chiang Mai, Thailand (Karmito 2005), and supported by the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA). In 2009, ABTAPL representative Allan Linfield attended the 5th ForATL Consultation, which focused on cross-regional collaboration, database development, and librarian education, further deepening ties between ABTAPL and Asian networks (Sellan 2009, 1–2) and Hall made visits to some of ForATL libraries (Hall 2023, 23).

ABTAPL's commitment to international engagement was further demonstrated at the 2008 theological librarians' conference in Moscow, co-hosted by the Moscow Theological Seminary and the Euro-Asian Accrediting Association. The event brought together librarians, educators, and IT professionals to address challenges in theological education, including digital resources, cataloguing standards, and open-source tools. ABTAPL's participation helped shape discussions that led to the formation of a Euro-Asian theological library consortium and a regional library association, expanding the global network of theological librarianship (Zakharov 2009, 21–23).

The most recent exciting development occurred when Hannie Riley, Chair of ABTAPL, visited the Korean Theological University and Seminary Library Association (KTLA) in 2023 to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary (Riley 2023, 48-49). Further collaboration between ABTAPL and KTLA to support libraries in the Majority World is currently under discussion. Eight delegates from KTLA will visit Oxford in June 2025 for a five-day exchange of ideas (pers. comm., 2025).

These are only a few examples. ABTAPL's sustained relationships with ITLA, ForATL, and other global bodies have helped ensure that the association remains a vital contributor to the international theological library community.

Other Provisions

Support for overseas libraries has not been limited to physical items like books or publications. Beyond this resource provision, ABTAPL invested heavily in mentoring and professional development by providing training, mentoring, consultation and exchange opportunities to overseas colleagues.

In many cases, theological seminary libraries in the majority world tend to have no full-time library staff, operating only through intermittent help or are overseen by staff without formal library or information qualifications or education. Recognising this reality, the Association of Christian Librarians' CILA (Christians in Library and Information Service) has "a strong tradition of providing help and support to Christian libraries and colleges overseas" via their Overseas Assistance provision (CLIS, n.d.). Dennis C. Tucker of the Association of Christian Librarians notes that the mission of its Commission for International Library Assistance is "to provide support for libraries in developing countries where there is a lack of formal training or financial resources" (Tucker 2001, 28). This absence of trained personnel is one of the biggest problems such libraries face, even though these untrained or volunteer librarians manage important college and seminary collections. The need for professional development and training remains acute.

Recognising this gap, ABTAPL members have been offering their expertise through both formal training programmes and informal mentoring relationships in regions where formal training in librarianship is scarce. Whether through in-person visits, remote support, or co-hosted workshops at international conferences, our members have helped create *Guidelines for Theological Libraries* (ABTAPL 1990) and freely provided it to overseas libraries via TBN (Berends 2009), sharing expertise and encouragement with remarkable generosity.

Also, members frequently volunteered their time to mentor new librarians by correspondence, offering advice on cataloguing, acquisitions policies, preservation techniques, and library management. In some instances, this mentoring involved hosting visiting librarians in UK institutions.

One example is found in the contribution of Rita England to theological librarianship in Asia. England contributed to the transformation of the Tao Fong Shan library in Hong Kong into a dynamic Asian theological resource centre. Drawing on institutional and missionary

collections, the library required extensive restoration, reorganisation, and contextual cataloguing. England advocated for a theological librarianship that reflects Asian contexts, challenging Western classification systems that often misrepresent or obscure indigenous Christian thought. She described her vision as one of "rice roots" rather than "grassroots," underscoring the need for libraries embedded in local cultural and theological realities. Her consultancy extended to the development of a new Resource Centre in Osaka, Japan, intended for Asia-wide use, with a focus on reclaiming and augmenting regional theological collections (England 1987).

Similarly, Emma Walsh, a college librarian and ABTAPL member, led a project at the East African Mission Orphanage (EAMO) in Nakuru, Kenya. Thousands of donated books had remained in storage due to a lack of staff and space. Walsh coordinated the sorting, shelving, and training efforts, personally travelling to Kenya to establish the library and equip local staff and students (2015, 20–21). Her work exemplified ABTAPL's mission to support practical, transformative projects and was supported by donations and partnerships from within the ABTAPL network. These involvements demonstrate the Association's commitment to advancing access to education worldwide.

Also, ABTAPL has promoted the value of cross-cultural exchange by facilitating placements between theological libraries in the UK and overseas institutions. In one example, a Sri Lankan theological librarian visited a UK college in 2023, learning about electronic resource management, digital theology archives, and rare book care. Meanwhile, the host institution benefited from insights into oral history preservation and community-based reader services. These short-term exchanges foster mutual learning and cross-cultural understanding, strengthening global networks of theological librarianship.

Another example, as recounted in the *Bulletin*, volume 16, issue 1, Ania Andriamihaja, a librarian from Madagascar, undertook a month-long volunteer placement at Westminster College Library, Cambridge (2009, 14). Such exchanges allow for skills transfer, professional networking, and the strengthening of global theological library communities. This exchange exemplified ABTAPL's role in facilitating meaningful cross-cultural dialogue and solidified its place within the global network of theological libraries.

ABTAPL also recognised that resource provision and mentoring were insufficient without addressing the infrastructural and financial realities many libraries faced. One particularly innovative model explored by ABTAPL was the provision of large grants for overseas

theological libraries. These grants typically cover the acquisition of a core theological collection, a computer system for cataloguing, and some basic furniture. Though modest by Western standards, such grants often make the difference between success and struggle for new theological colleges.

Moreover, financial support extended to assistance with shipping costs for donated materials, ensuring that well-intentioned donations were not left stranded in warehouses or ports due to lack of funds. In partnership with the Theological Book Network and other organisations like OTRL, ABTAPL members helped cover these practical, often overlooked expenses.

Challenges and Opportunities

Lambe (1987) pointed out challenges and opportunities in the *Bulletin* 38 years ago and these remain true today. British theological libraries, marked by institutional diversity and fragmentation, face challenges in coordination and professionalisation when compared to more structured models in North America and Europe (12–14). In the UK, theological collections span private libraries, seminaries, church libraries, higher education, and mission agencies, making unified development difficult (13–14). By contrast, networks such as Atla in the States and denominational associations in Europe have enabled stronger collaboration, training, and standardisation (12–13).

Lambe argued that international engagement offers vital opportunities for British theological librarianship. He highlighted how theological libraries in the global South, such as in Sri Lanka, Mozambique, and Nicaragua, have innovatively integrated theological education with social development and literacy initiatives (1987, 13). These models demonstrate that theological literature can support not just formal education but also grassroots discipleship, making theological libraries part of a global communication network.

Crucially, Lambe called for a shift in mindset, from isolated helping to genuine partnering, that values the wisdom and innovation of Majority World contexts. His appeal for British librarians to learn from and collaborate with international peers continues to resonate, as ABTAPL plays a key role in fostering global theological dialogue and professional exchange: "[By] communicat[ing] with colleagues in different environments, is to learn more about the possibilities and value of theological and religious literature. Despite the idiosyncracy so

characteristic of the British scene, the international perspective – west, east and south – is imperative" (1987, 15). These rich opportunities still remain as theological librarians in the UK possess resources, experience, and networks that can make a significant difference, especially coupled with humility and attentiveness to local needs.

Conclusion

Over the past seventy years, ABTAPL has consistently demonstrated that theological librarianship transcends borders. Rooted in a vision that began with international aspiration, first as a proposed British section of a global theological library network, ABTAPL has lived out its founding ethos by fostering meaningful partnerships, sharing knowledge, and extending practical support to theological libraries across the world.

This chapter has traced ABTAPL's multifaceted contributions to global theological education. From the production of enduring reference tools like the *Guide to Theological Libraries* and the *Union List of Periodicals*, to the publication of adaptable and widely circulated *Guidelines for Theological Libraries*, ABTAPL has built a legacy of offering trusted, professional resources that assist institutions far beyond the UK. These publications became vital not only for British theological institutions but also for under-resourced seminaries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The emphasis has always been not on imposing uniformity, but on enabling local theological institutions to flourish according to their own context.

Yet ABTAPL's global impact goes far beyond publications. Its members have embodied a deeply relational, incarnational model of professional service. As seen through projects such as Emma Walsh's library creation at EAMO in Kenya, or the mentoring support provided to institutions in Madagascar, Nairobi, and Ukraine, ABTAPL's work has made a tangible difference. These actions reflect a theology of librarianship grounded in presence, partnership, and pastoral care, offering not only books, but hope, dignity, and encouragement to communities committed to theological learning under challenging circumstances.

Equally important has been ABTAPL's strategic collaboration with global partners, including BETH and Atla, its support of regional networks like ForATL, ITLA, and the emerging library communities in Eastern Europe and the Global South. Through these networks, ABTAPL has helped shape professional standards, advocate for access

to knowledge, and amplify voices from diverse traditions and settings. The international theological library community is stronger today because of ABTAPL's active presence.

At its best, ABTAPL has modelled what it means to be a learning community in service to others – open to mutual exchange, sensitive to difference, and grounded in a shared conviction that theological education matters. ABTAPL members have recognised that a book is not simply a commodity but a theological witness. A well-catalogued library is not merely an efficient system, but a gateway to deeper reflection, academic growth, and ecclesial service. A gift of surplus materials, when thoughtfully curated and lovingly delivered, becomes a seed of transformation in the life of a seminary.

In a globalised and increasingly unequal world, theological libraries have a critical role to play as spaces of inclusion, dialogue, and formation. ABTAPL's global impact reminds us that these spaces flourish not through isolation, but through relationships. As we look ahead to the future of theological librarianship, may ABTAPL continue to extend its shelves, reaching not only into new geographies but into deeper practices of hospitality, justice, and shared learning.

As we celebrate seventy years of ABTAPL, we recommit ourselves not only to excellence in our own libraries, but also to the global theological education's call to justice, generosity, and learning. In a world of growing disparity, theological librarians have a unique role to play in bridging gaps and fostering genuine partnerships across cultures and continents.

To all ABTAPL members past and present who have contributed to this legacy, thank you. Let's keep turning the page together.

> It is our hope that this contact will bring to the academic community a wealth of knowledge and a valuable contribution to theological learning, as well as a sensitivity to co-operation that crosses linguistic, cultural and even traditional religious lines worldwide. (Geuns and Hall 1998, 15)

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Links to Other Institutions Mentioned

American Theological Library Association (Atla) *https://www.atla.com /*

Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association (ANZTLA) *https://www.anztla.org/*

Association of Christian Librarians (ACL) *https://www.acl.org/*

Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie (BETH) *https://beth.eu/*

Book Aid Charitable Trust (Book Aid) *https://book-aid.org/*

Books2Africa *https://books2africa.org/*

East African Mission Orphanage (EAMO) *https://www.eastafricanmission.org/*

Feed the Mind *https://feedtheminds.org/*

Forum of Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL) *https://www.foratl.org/fhead.htm*

Indian Theological Library Association (ITLA) *https://www.oocities.org/itla_in/home.html*

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) *https://www.ifla.org/*

Korean Theological Seminary and University Library Association (KTLA) *https://www.ktla.or.kr/*

Langham Partnership *https://langham.org/global-resources/*

Oxford Theology Resources Link (OTRL) *https://oxfordtheologyresourceslink.web.ox.ac.uk/*

Theological Book Network (TBN) *https://www.scholarleaders.org/tbn/*

Theology on the Web *https://theologyontheweb.org.uk/*

Overseas Book Service (OBS) by Feed the Mind *https://www.feedtheminds.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Donating-Books-to-OBS.pdf*

4theWord Resource Distributors (4WRD) *https://4wrd.org/*

Notes

1   The Rev. Roger Thomas was a librarian at Dr. William's library in the 1950s (Powles 2022, 521).

2   *http://www.le.ac.uk/abtapl/*.

3   *https://abtapljournals.wordpress.com/*.

4   Gillian Cain is the Director of Membership & Engagement of Atla; *https://www.atla.com/person/gillian-harrison-cain/*.

Weather, Welcomes, and Wheelie Bins

An Affectionate Look Back at the ABTAPL Spring (Usually) Conference

> *When delving into the back issues of the ABTAPL Bulletin for historical research, I re-read Judy's "Weather, Welcomes – and Wheelie Bins" and realised that we could not do better for a chapter on the history of the ABTAPL Spring conference. As former ABTAPL committee member Michael Gale remarked, it is "a tour de force – a light touch and a generosity of spirit" (pers. comm., May 30, 2025). It also highlights, in a sense, the real history of ABTAPL – of connections made, dinners enjoyed, fascinating libraries visited and most of all, the people of ABTAPL who made it all possible. I introduce you now to Judy Smith-Blow (then Judy Powles), who, in this chapter, is addressing the ABTAPL Spring Conference on its Diamond Jubilee Anniversary conference in Rome, March 2016.*
>
> — Christine Love-Rodgers

JUDITH SMITH-BLOW (NÉE POWLES), UPDATED BY CHRISTINE LOVE-RODGERS

Weather, Welcomes, and Wheelie Bins

From 1989 until 2014, I attended every single conference without exception and it is because of this that I have been asked to put a few thoughts and memories together, hopefully to entertain

you in this graveyard slot when everyone is collapsing with weariness after their travelling from far and wide.

I shall repeat here something our former honorable secretary, Mary Elliott, said in the piece she wrote for the Golden Jubilee Bulletin – "Of course, perversely, it's the non-professional aspects of conferences that stick in the memory" (Elliott 2006, 23). And that is exactly the case for me and for many of you!

Some of you may be wondering about the title of this presentation:

Weather – this is because we all seem to remember the extremes of weather experienced during the conferences. We have encountered everything from snow to almost tropical conditions.

Welcomes – this is because so many ABTAPL members have commented on the warmth of the welcome given to them, both by the conference host and also by the other delegates. However there have also been a few conferences where the host institution would not pass the charm school test.

And **Wheelie bins**? – well I will come onto that in due course.

I'll begin by giving a bit of historical background to the legendary Spring Conference which, unlike the Association, has not been going for the past 60 years. From what I can gather, the first residential conference took place in Durham in 1978. But before that, ABTAPL had some input into the Library Association's Universities, Colleges and Research Section residential conference at the University of Surrey in 1975. According to Mary Elliott, "ABTAPL made a successful, if modest, contribution to the Conference" (Elliott 1975, 2).

And it is here that ABTAPL must acknowledge the huge debt it owes to the honorable secretary of the time, Mary Elliott. It is largely due to Mary and also to the late John Howard that the conferences became such a huge part of the Association's life.

Over the next almost 40 years (this is our 39th residential conference), conferences have been held in university halls of residences, conference centres, retreat houses and, more recently, hotels. It is fair to say that the accommodation has been very varied, ranging from Spartan to complete luxury. There was also the tradition for going "North" one year and "South" the next so that nobody felt disadvantaged in terms of travel distances.

Over the years the start and end days have varied with, in more recent years, a pattern emerging for a Thursday to Saturday model as opposed to the original weekend format of Friday to Sunday. The committee in my time as Chairman had long discussions on this subject, but some of the key factors were that it was often difficult to organize visits

on Saturdays/Sundays and Sunday travel could be very long given the inevitable engineering works on the line. My own experience of the Glasgow conference in 1993 bore this out and I will refer to this later.

Regarding location, the winner in the venue popularity stakes is Cambridge with four conferences. Bristol, Durham, Manchester, Oxford and Salisbury are runners up with three each. Some of the "one-hit wonders" include Chichester, Lancaster, Leicester, Lincoln and Exeter.

For many years there was no such thing as a specific Conference Secretary. The poor Honorable Secretary seemed to do most of the organizing: Mary Elliott with help from John Howard, and later Alan Jesson. But eventually the role of Conference Secretary came into being and we enjoyed conferences organized by Margaret Ecclestone, Rosemary Pugh, Alan Linfield and Rachel Campion with help from people on the ground such as Dorothy Wright in Manchester, Evelyn Cornell in Leicester, Dorothy Anderson in Belfast and more recently Jenny Monds and Jayne Downey in Salisbury and then Carol Reekie in Cambridge. And here we are in Rome with Alan ably leading us again! As for the future . . .

And what of conference delegates over the years? Each year along with a "hard core" of old (and not so old) faithfuls there have been newbies – some new to theological and philosophical librarianship, others taking the plunge to attend after some (or indeed many) years in post. There have also been many visitors from overseas, near and far. It has always been good to welcome them. At some conferences there have been representatives from commercial companies joining us – they have had to run the gauntlet of ABTAPL ire over subscription rates, book prices, etc. etc., but on the whole I think that they have found it helpful, as have we, being able to discuss things positively face to face.

And of course there have been a few eccentrics along the way, many of whom have been sorely missed when they were no longer able to join us. Marion Smith has a lovely memory of Pat Mugliston, who retired in 1988 but who kept coming to conferences until, as John Howard commented in her obituary in 2004, "increasing deafness and the multiplication of her cats made it too difficult for her" (Howard 2004, 6). Marion remembered Pat at the Maynooth conference, "We were walking back to the college and her face lit up when she saw a trailer loaded with a speedboat (I think – either that or a fast car!)." I think we were all totally surprised when we learned that Pat at her death was a double millionaire and had left a bequest to her two cats, Matilda and Top Cat.

All these people have added to the rich tapestry of the ABTAPL Spring Conference.

Many people remember not only the conferences but also the travelling to and from the venues, sometimes in British Rail adversity! There was so much camaraderie, interesting conversations, etc. I have never forgotten Mary Elliott on one journey enthusing about this wonderful book, a sort of crime story set in a medieval monastery complete with labyrinthine library. You guessed it – Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose.* I just had to buy it on my return and I was immediately hooked – though it is one of those Marmite books – you either love it or hate it!

So returning to that first conference all those years ago in 1978 at St John's College, Durham, Mary Elliott describes it as "a modest affair, but which attracted 27 members, more than our previous half-day meetings" (Elliott 2006, 23). This comment is in itself significant as it just goes to show that there was an interest amongst the members to get together professionally for a longer period than had been the norm with the half-day meeting. The conference seemed to consist of a series of interesting visits rather than having a specific theme or speakers. However I rather enjoyed the comment in the 1978 June *Bulletin* "Minds and bodies relaxed in the atmosphere of bookshops and pubs, of godly learning and good living, of Bede and Cuthbert, of Norman architecture, Anglican chant and the whole Christian tradition that Durham has preserved through the centuries" (Howard 1978, 2). It conjures up such a wonderful picture.

The following year, 1979, was held at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden (now the Gladstone Library). This one seems to have stuck in many people's memories but not for the best reasons! I rather gather that the Warden of the time was not one of those people who knew the words "Warm Welcome". Apparently, he ran the place with military precision and not all ABTAPL members could cope with this. Mary remembers that several delegates travelled on a London–Holyhead train which was held up for a considerable time – no explanation given. Only later they learnt of the murder of Airey Neave; the train had been searched in case the perpetrator was on board. Mary also comments how, on the lighter side, they met the "totally Trollopian Vice-Dean of Chester Cathedral" (Elliott 2006, 23). One interesting point about this conference, though, was the introduction of a seminar on cataloguing and classification, the first sign of a 'Continuing Professional Development' element, though I don't suppose that phrase was used then.

In 1980, the conference headed for York to the rather romantic sounding Hazlewood Castle, Tadcaster. This was a historic house,

owned for centuries by one family, but in 1972 it had become the home of Carmelite monks and a centre for their work in Yorkshire. The 18th-century stable block had been converted into a guest house for visitors and it was here that ABTAPL took up residence. The main highlight of this weekend for John Howard, as he recorded in his memoir at the Golden Jubilee Conference, was "the involuntary defenestration during the night of a lady member who had lost the key of her room" (Howard 2006, 21)! Reading the conference report I felt absolutely exhausted by hearing of the number of visits packed into one day beginning with the Bar Convent followed by York Minster Library. The late Alan Smith gives a lovely description of the party after lunch "motoring across the North Yorkshire Moors to Shandy Hall, Coxwold, the parsonage for eight years of the novelist Laurence Sterne" (A. Smith 1980, 2). Then they headed for Ampleforth Abbey for another visit. No wonder Alan describes the conference as "most enjoyable, if hectic" (A. Smith 1980, 3).

1981 saw the first of three conferences at Bristol, this one being held at Trinity College but with a fairly small number, a core of about fifteen. Again the main memories of the conference seem to be the many visits on the Saturday, starting with Trinity's own Library, then Wesley College followed by Bristol Baptist College, the highlight of this being the removal from the safe for ABTAPL members to see of the unique extant copy of Tyndale's 1526 New Testament – as the conference report comments "probably the most valuable individual book in the whole of Bristol" (Larkin 1981, 2). There followed a trip to Downside Abbey. I was intrigued to read of the evening talk by a local bookseller on the occultist writer A. E. Waite, who died in 1939. Peter Larkin's report describes, "At first sight this appeared rather remote from usual ABTAPL territory, but so many were the ramifications of Waite's own influences, and so absorbing was Mr. Gilbert's advocacy of the value of his subject that much discussion followed the lecture, which had been illustrated with slides" (Larkin 1981, 3).

The first of ABTAPL's four Cambridge conferences took place in 1982, on that occasion staying at Selwyn College. According to Lionel Madden writing the conference report, "The weekend started in fine style with the rare treat of a talk by Professor Owen Chadwick, Master of Selwyn" (Madden 1982, 2). After a visit to Westcott House, Lionel describes how, "Fortified by lunch, some of us ventured on an exhausting afternoon tour of some of the colleges and their chapels under the guidance of a knowledgeable lady of determined manner, extraordinary rapidity of movement, and indefatigable zeal for Foxe's

Book of Martyrs" (Madden 1982, 3). The final comment by Lionel struck a chord – "My only regret, as I listened to the reminiscences of long established members, is that I did not begin attending them years ago" (Madden 1982, 3).

In 1983, ABTAPL headed across the border into Scotland for the first time with the conference being held at the Scottish Episcopal Church's Theological College in Edinburgh. By all accounts this venue was very Spartan and so cold that warm pyjamas had to be lent to a delegate from Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), the late Goma Ndamba. I was intrigued to read in the Bulletin report that John Howard, who organized the conference, "had more than his fair share of ill-luck" (Walsh 1983). What did this mean, I wonder? Also Michael Walsh writing the report talks of a gloomy account of the problems faced by Dr. Stephen Pattison in his attempts to supervise the host library. The gloom continued the following morning when members visited the library of the Scottish Congregational College. As Michael comments, "Both institutions provided object-lessons in the problems faced by under-funded, understaffed and under-used collections of religious literature" (Walsh 1983). Oh dear!

1984 saw twenty-two members heading to Manchester to stay at St Anselm Hall. There were the usual visits, including the Deansgate building of the University Library (the John Rylands Library). Nothing out of the ordinary seemed to have occurred though it was interesting to read John Howard's comment on the Sunday morning service held in the Hall's octagonal chapel which many ABTAPL members attended. He said, "this was a moving occasion, being the first time ABTAPL had included such a service as part of the programme. lt helped to confirm and enlarge the spirit of engagement in a common task which the weekend had stimulated" (Howard 1984).

Thirty-one ABTAPL members turned their faces south in 1984 to stay at Chichester Theological College. This seems to have been the highest turnout so far and the conference had a specific theme, "The Education of Theological Librarians." Also, it was the first time the conference had continued into the Sunday afternoon. Apart from the various visits, members enjoyed the professional input and, as Ruth Gibson in her report commented, "Many felt that the papers had enhanced a feeling of professionalism amongst its members" (Gibson 1985).

As a result of the desire expressed in Chichester for younger members and less experienced members to receive advice on various aspects of theological librarianship, the 1985 conference started a day earlier to accommodate a training day. Consequently, fourteen members

arrived at Manchester College, Oxford, on the Thursday evening, ready to enjoy a variety of practical sessions during Friday before the rest of the delegates joined the conference in the evening. Visits were packed in as usual, including Blackwell's distribution centre and the Bodleian Library. However, Elizabeth Williams's report noted that during the afternoon's visits to various college libraries, "There was so much to see that we had to cancel our scheduled visit to Oriel College" (E. Williams 1986). Thanks were expressed to Mary Elliott for her organization of the conference on this "very unspringlike weekend."

I am very grateful to Alan Jesson for his recollections of the next two conferences held at Lancaster in 1987 and Lincoln Theological College in 1988 as there are no reports in the *Bulletin*. However, Alan's own recollections of Lancaster are, as he puts it, "a bit of a blur" as he had recently slipped a disc! He does particularly remember the visit to Stonyhurst College by coach, which was a journey over narrow and rough country roads. Getting off the coach at Stoneyhurst was not at all comfortable! Alan remembers the presentations and lectures as first class, including in particular a talk on Victorian religious literature, though Helen Greenwood, a visitor from New Zealand, described all the papers given as "Scholarly rather than practical" (Greenwood 1987)!

The Lincoln conference was the first conference Alan Jesson organized as ABTAPL's new Honorable Secretary, but he inherited it halfway through and did not do the initial arrangements. As he remarks, "Had I been able to do a preliminary visit to Edward King House, I think that I might have gone elsewhere." It turned out that most people had to share rooms which were "pretty primitive." Alan came down early the first morning to find one of the delegates on his way out with his bag packed. His roommate not only snored, but moaned and talked in his sleep, and this poor man had had no sleep at all. Fortunately, Alan managed to find him an alternative and he stayed on. After that, things got better!

And now we are in 1989 in Cambridge – my very first conference. I had been told about the Spartan accommodation of Lincoln the previous year and the biting cold winds, so I was totally unprepared for the luxury of a lovely modern bedroom at Fitzwilliam College, complete with hotel style toiletries, etc., laid out on the bed and the glorious sunshine showing Cambridge at its best. If truth be told, I was also rather worried about being a newbie amongst these potentially "strange" theological and philosophical librarians for a whole weekend but I needn't have been so concerned. From the outset, I was made to feel so welcome and I warmed immediately to this group of people, many of whom I

now consider to be close friends. The theme of this conference was "Conservation and Disaster Planning" and my recollection is of many interesting, practical talks on the subject – all these are reproduced in the November *Bulletin* for that year (Ratcliffe et al. 1989). However, there were so many talks packed in that, unusually for an ABTAPL conference, there were no scheduled visits. My plan had been to do some touristy things on the Sunday after the conference had finished but, sadly, the sunshine had disappeared and heavy rain descended.

1990 saw us head for Birmingham, staying out at Selly Oak – I think it was at Westhill College (now demolished, I believe). The theme of this conference was "Multiculturalism," highly appropriate considering our location. With no report in the *Bulletin* I am having to rely on my own memory. Unusually, nothing comes to mind about the accommodation or weather so there couldn't have been any problems or otherwise with either! However, I do have a recollection of driving round and round the grey concrete of the Central Library in Birmingham trying to find the vehicle entrance! Another memory is of the warm welcome given to us by the Library staff, including our late friend, Alan Smith, who later took over editing the *Bulletin*, and also Marion Smith, here with us in Rome, who, with Andrew Lacey, took over the editorship following Alan's sudden and tragic death in March 1992, aged 42.

The accommodation for the 1991 conference at Hatfield College, Durham, sticks in my mind. My room was halfway up an Oxbridge-type wooden staircase. It was so incredibly noisy as heavy-footed undergraduates (allowed to stay up for the vacation) pounded up and down the staircase at all times of day and night. The theme for this conference was "Strategic Planning for Libraries" or as Alan Jesson described it in the conference invitation, "a rather upmarket way of saying 'How to run your library better!'" As Ruth Gibson commented in her report, "Anyone who joined us anticipating a restful weekend would have had quite a shock. It is true that we had only one library visit, but the weekend was led in such a way that no one could take a back seat" (Gibson 1991). This was my first introduction to a type of management exercise, where we divided into groups, each with a large piece of paper, and were invited to work on mission statements using SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). For a little light relief we did, however, manage to see Durham Cathedral Library. I think that some members came away from that conference feeling a little shell-shocked, though many of

us found this new way of looking both at our own libraries and also ABTAPL itself very helpful.

And possibly to the dismay of those shell-shocked members, the following year continued the management theme and here I introduce the Wheelie Bins! So in 1992 (my first as ABTAPL Chairman) we stayed at Salisbury and Wells Theological College, now Sarum College (in the days before the refurbishment which we enjoyed in later years). It turns out that the planned main speaker had pulled out virtually at the last minute leaving Alan Jesson in a mild state of panic (his words). Fortunately, one of his friends at church worked for an organisation in Cambridge specialising in management training and offered him at a bargain rate the package usually aimed at local government officers. This saw us again dividing into groups, each of us being given a specific role within a fictional local authority and told to fight our corner for funding. My remit was the environment and I had to speak on behalf of retaining wheelie bins, amongst other things! Votes were cast and I am pleased to say that I won on behalf of wheelie bins everywhere. It did turn out to be a valuable exercise as so many of us were then, as now, facing threats to funding within our institutions and to be able to "fight our corners" was particularly helpful. There must have been some visits during this conference but Wheelie Bins dominate my memory!

It was back to Scotland in 1993, this time to Jordanhill College in Glasgow. My memory is of arriving with a group of other ABTAPL members at the main station and looking hopelessly around us for a sign to the local station, which we needed to get us out to Jordanhill. A lovely local gentleman came to our rescue – none of us could understand a word he said as his accent was so thick but he kindly led us down steps, round corners and finally onto the platform. I don't remember that much about the conference, apart from a line of black taxis which arrived on the Friday evening to take us for a special visit to the Mitchell Library, floodlit for our benefit (well perhaps not!). However, I do remember very clearly the journey home on the Sunday. We left Glasgow as normal, but on reaching Carlisle, the announcement was made that there was good news and bad news. The bad news was that the train was having to divert, the good news (according to the announcer) was that the diversion was going to be along the famous Carlisle to Settle line. The fact that they were removing the buffet car at Carlisle was not included in the announcement, but we only discovered later on our very long, cold journey home that there were no refreshments

to be had, so the wonderful scenery rather passed us by on that bleak Sunday afternoon. We were very late getting home.

Our second trip to Bristol took place in 1994 staying at The Hawthorns, part of the University. The various visits mirrored the earlier conference with, once again, the glimpse of the Tyndale Bible at Bristol Baptist College being one of the highlights. It was almost immediately after that conference that we heard that the Bible had been sold to the British Library for a million pounds. As Jean Woods wrote in her conference report, "Those who missed seeing the book at Bristol will soon be able to see it on show in the British Library, though not with the intimacy with which we were able to see it in the small chapel of Bristol Baptist College" (Woods 1994, 21).

1995 was something of a first when we went "abroad" for our conference – to St Patrick's College, Maynooth, just outside Dublin. The College was celebrating the 200th anniversary of its foundation and the conference took as its theme "Maynooth's 200 years: the old and the new". Some thirty of us attended, including my late husband, John, who was to accompany me on so many subsequent conferences. Sadly (or perversely, as Mary might comment) the memory which strikes me most is that of our room in the Pugin-designed seminary being at the end of the long corridor on the "Men's floor". To reach the ladies' bathroom I had to walk the length of the top corridor, go down a wide stone staircase and then go along the corridor on the floor beneath which had been designated for the female attendees. On the Sunday morning (Palm Sunday), I came out of our room in my dressing gown, armed with my soap bag ready for the long trek, only to find myself being passed by a steady stream of earnest young seminarians on their way to the Chapel. Embarrassment all round – or perhaps not!

Another clear memory was our first evening meal, which seemed to be more of a high tea with pots of tea on the table and plates of bread and butter – a rather low-key affair. We were expecting the same the following evening and the majority of us were therefore underdressed accordingly, only to be taken aback by the very formal anniversary dinner, complete with wine bearing the Maynooth anniversary labels, which had been laid on for everyone staying on that evening. A final anecdote from me is of an evening expedition into Dublin which some of us took, returning on the local bus only to find that the gates were locked. To this day I can't remember how we got in – but we must have somehow!

In 1996 we returned to Oxford, this time staying at Regent's Park College. The conference included a visit to Pusey House, where I

remember Penny Hall's eyes lighting up at the sight of the organ in the chapel there – and then she was actually allowed to play it. I don't remember much more about the conference except that we watched a couple of training videos featuring John Cleese. One, I recall, was on answering the telephone effectively! Rosemary Pugh remembers being very grateful for Alan Jesson's car mechanic skills when her car wouldn't start at the end of the conference. Multi-talented librarians.

Moving on to 1997 in Winchester, the stapled rabbit immediately comes to mind as do the many hills we walked up and down during the course of the conference. We stayed at King Alfred's College and this year's theme was "Design and Display," the conference running from Saturday to Monday. The main session on the Sunday afternoon was devoted to a demonstration on display techniques given by a rather dynamic couple who seemed to have a fetish with a staple gun. I remember distinctly letting out a howl of anguish as a poor soft toy rabbit was stapled with great relish to a display board by its ears. There was also a "hands-on" participation exercise – I was totally useless. This same couple were of an artistic temperament and our poor Honorable Secretary of the time, Andrew Lacey, had to display the patience of a saint as they complained about access and other issues before and after the presentation. It was in Winchester that the decision to move the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to the Spring residential conference was made. So the AGM became a highlight (or not!) of the weekend. We did, that weekend, also see the Winchester Bible, a great treat.

In 1998 we returned to Manchester, staying at St Anselm Hall again, but moving round the corner to Luther King House for our conference sessions. This conference was ably organised by Dorothy Wright with the theme of "Multiculturalism and Nonconformity" and featured an excellent mix of talks and visits. It also featured stuffing envelopes with questionnaires for the *Guide to Theological Libraries*! Another memory is of a fantastic cream tea given to members attending the pre-conference Theological Heritage User Group (THUG) meeting at the Nazarene College. Food plays such an important part in my memories!

And food (and wine) played a large part in the following year's conference in 1999, organised by Andrew Lacey at Trinity Hall, Cambridge with the theme "The New Small Library," taking advantage of the fact that a number of Cambridge colleges had built new or refurbished their old libraries. The new Jerwood Library at Trinity Hall was particularly impressive – I remember seeing the window seats in the Library where students could sit and read as they looked out watching the river flow past. Less impressive was Andrew's office, which was more of a broom

cupboard. We also had visits to Sidney Sussex and Jesus College. As for our meals, despite the fact that we sat on long benches, the quality of the food and wine was superb and not to be forgotten!

2000 in York was a special year in the annals. However, for me personally, and one or two others, it is a year to be forgotten. This was the year when the residential conference moved from Spring to Autumn so that the ABTAPL conference could follow immediately the BETH conference, which was being hosted by ABTAPL at the College of Ripon and York St John. Graham Cornish, an ABTAPL committee member for many years, who was at that time working at the British Library, Boston Spa, helped greatly with the organisation. Rather than revisit all the difficulties experienced, which involved a significant theft from one of the overseas visitors, anyone wishing to find out more is invited to read my report in the *Bulletin* for that year (M. Smith 2000). I would like to repeat my thanks to Andrew Lacey for all that he did to help. And this is probably the moment to thank Andrew as well for the many wonderful talks on a variety of historical topics relevant to our particular venue which he has given to us over the years as our "resident academic." Similarly, Graham Cornish has over many years added to our professional knowledge with his many sessions on copyright issues.

It wasn't all bad though in York, and we had some wonderful times with our BETH friends though it may have sounded a bit like the Tower of Babel at times. A visit to Ampleforth Abbey particularly stands out. We had been invited to attend Evensong but were relegated to the gallery at the back of the Abbey as we "wouldn't understand the service as it was in Latin." We were also told to keep very quiet. Given that a large number of us were well-versed in Latin and well understood how services of this nature were conducted we felt a little put down – or even peeved, if I am being honest! We were also not allowed access to the monastery library, though we did see the school library with its Mouseman furniture. The other perverse memory is of our visit to the Bar Convent. If I say "The Hand" some of you may shudder as I do. In the Chapel there is a very special relic, carefully covered with a cloth. This relic is the perfectly-preserved hand of Saint Margaret Clitherow. When the nun showing us round asked if we would like her to remove the cloth, I think most of us were willing that cloth to stay put, but one delegate piped up, "Yes, please," and the cloth was ceremonially removed. The hand is indeed well-preserved but that is all I will say!

Just 6 months later, in Spring 2001, we were meeting again, this time in Exeter at St Luke's College with the theme "Cataloguing the

Specialist Collections in Today's Theological Libraries," the first conference organised by Rosemary Pugh. Rosemary and her lovely husband, John, often with their camper van, became permanent fixtures on the delegate list for each conference. I don't remember too much about the details, except that there was a good mix of visits and talks. Rosemary remembers us all arriving at the accommodation block but having to wait absolutely ages for someone to come and let us in. Some of us had en-suite rooms and others didn't, and it was after this conference that the committee decided to recommend en-suite for all. Also, there was a school party in the same block as some of us. One night, they decided to have a game of football in the corridor after we had all gone to bed. We were not amused. For those of us who had been in York, it also brought back bad memories of the rowdy student reunion which had caused so many problems at that conference.

In 2002 it was north again, this time staying at Chester College with rooms containing little ensuite "pods" (for want of a better word). Here we again had a mixture of talks and visits, one of which was a return to St Deiniol's. Fortunately for those who had attended the infamous 1979 conference, the Warden was no longer there and we had a very warm welcome from Patsy Williams and her colleagues. Graham Cornish also led some very interesting and informative sessions on copyright. Canon Roy Barker gave a very entertaining talk on the Cathedral Library in lieu of a visit as it was sadly being refurbished. I think this was the first conference where the popular "Open Forum" session was featured.

Our second visit to Salisbury occurred in 2003, again staying at Sarum College. If I mention "the lunch bags" many of you will instantly recall the picture, which was subsequently featured on the website and the ABTAPL publicity leaflet, showing all the delegates clutching white paper bags in a thick mist! The theme of this conference was "A Theology of Religious Record-Keeping" and we had some memorable visits, including Downside Abbey (who could forget the wonderful welcome given to us by the charming Dom Daniel Rees?), and Wells Cathedral with their two lovely librarians. I also remember the visit to Salisbury Cathedral Library and being "welcomed" by the rather fierce librarian who was keen to point out the cupboard housing a toilet specially built to save her having to go up and down the many steps leading back down into the Cathedral. More perverse memories!

My distinct memory of the 2004 conference held in Leicester, staying at Beaumont Hall near the Botanical Gardens, is of the visit to the Jain Centre in central Leicester. This had originally been a nonconformist

Chapel but its frontage had been remodelled with Jain carvings. I had never seen anything like it before. Again, we had a very warm welcome and I learned much about Jain spirituality. Of course, much of the conference focussed on multiculturalism. Another thing I remember is that we had two representatives from Continuum joining us for the whole conference. A baptism by fire for them, I suspect! Evelyn Cornell, then on the staff at the University Library, had done much to help with the organisation of the conference and it was highly successful.

Durham in 2005 certainly sticks in my mind, first of all because of the weather. We had snow! This was the second conference my husband accompanied me and afterwards he commented on what a privilege it had been to go where no man or woman usually ever went. He was referring in particular to the visit to Auckland Castle, the home of the Bishop of Durham (then Tom Wright). As Carol Reekie recalls, "The Bishop gave us the run of his study – rare books intermingled with personal family possessions, it was a joy to see." I remember the guide saying to us that she had never been in that room before as it was definitely off the tourist route. Carol also says "We also saw the well-known paintings of the twelve tribes of Abraham (only one was missing). After our visit, I recall there was a lot of controversy about selling these." [1] We were indeed privileged. On a more negative note, we stayed at Collingwood College where, although the rooms were very comfortable, I have to say it was the worst shower experience I have ever had. Apparently my shriek as the cold water hit me was heard for miles!

And now the icing on the Conferences cake – the Golden Jubilee Conference in Prague, extended to 5 days in 2006, based at the International Baptist Theological Seminary just outside the city. What an amazing experience for the fifty-plus delegates who attended. The word "privilege" again comes to mind as, thanks to the amazing work of Alan Linfield (his first as solo conference secretary) with his on-the-spot connections in Prague, we were able to visit collections rarely seen by ordinary tourists, for example, the library of the Nostitz Palace (where we were followed round by a security guard carrying a large gun) and the theology and philosophy libraries of the Strahov Monastery. Carol again recalls "the bus routes being changed because a James Bond film with Daniel Craig was being filmed – something Alan could not have foreseen but he coped admirably."

And who could forget that brightly-coloured jester's hat? Where is it now? Many of us will also recall that amazing conference dinner in a restaurant overlooking Prague. I remember with affection our late

colleague John Howard who gave a marvellous overview of the first fifty years of ABTAPL. It was largely down to him, following a prompt from Graham Cornish (as I discovered from Graham only recently), that the almost moribund association had been resurrected. It is good to mention Lesley Utting's recollection here, joining the conference from New Zealand, "it was a wonderful setting to meet and make lifelong professional connections. The welcome was warm and this set the tone for the whole conference. Therefore the location, the programme, the visits and the people made this conference a highlight of my library career" (Utting 2006). Exactly so.

That was a hard act to follow, but Alan surpassed himself with the accommodation we found in Edinburgh at the Salisbury Green Hotel, part of the University's Pollock Halls complex – the first time ABTAPL had stayed in a hotel. Talk about quirky rooms. I think most of us were totally taken aback by the baronial style luxury – our room had, for example, its own little tower room – you went through a tiny door, up some stairs and then could sit in the turret window seat looking out at amazing views over Arthur's Seat. During the conference there was another good mix of interesting visits and talks, including one by Anthony Brewerton, an expert in library marketing. Marion Smith recalls introducing Humeyra Ceylan to John Howard in Edinburgh not long after she took over the *Bulletin*. Marion says "it felt a bit like passing on the baton in a relay." Perhaps one of the more memorable events was the sudden arrival of the haar (sea fog), which swept in and totally obliterated the day's glorious sunshine as we walked from the Scottish Catholic Archives to New College. It makes me shiver to think about it!

And now we move in 2008 from Scotland to Ireland again, this time to the north where we stayed at Stranmillis University College in Belfast, my last conference as Chairman. An extra day was added to the conference so that we could maximise our time in Northern Ireland. During the time, we packed in visits both within the city itself and outside, plus talks and presentations. Perhaps the highlight for most of us was on the Friday morning when we boarded a coach to Armagh. We ate our packed lunches on the steps of St Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral, much to the surprise of a large group gathering for a wedding. The coach then took us through the stunning scenery of the Mountains of Mourne and the coast road to Downpatrick, where we went to the Down County Museum and the Saint Patrick Centre. As Christine Ainsley recalls "Maybe we could remember the Irish idea of time: that bus tour over the Mournes for example (shall we eat

lunch now, in Armagh, or when we get to Downpatrick?) and arriving at the Patrick centre after it had closed!" One of the sad things at this conference is that we had to acknowledge the death of David Parry, who had been booked to attend. I am sure that Dave himself would have acknowledged that he was one of our eccentrics – I still don't know why a china pig accompanied him at mealtimes at so many of our conferences!

In 2009 we found ourselves back in Oxford, this time staying at Worcester College with the attendance (43 delegates) higher than any previous conference other than the Golden Jubilee. The weather was absolutely amazing for the entire time. The food and accommodation were excellent, there were really interesting visits and it was hard to remember anything detracting from our enjoyment, professional and personal. I particularly enjoyed the optional afternoon visit to Yarnton Manor, the home of the Oxford Centre for Jewish and Hebrew studies.

The amazing weather continued the following year in 2010, when we returned to Bristol. This was the first conference organized by Rachel Campion and what an excellent job she did, especially in negotiating a great rate for us to stay at the Mercure Brigstow hotel near the river. We enjoyed all the visits, which included the New Room (John Wesley's first chapel) and Charles Wesley's house, but I particularly remember the final session on the use and process of 'marketing strategy' within the theological library sector. We certainly felt that we had earned our keep professionally, so to speak. It was sad to hear at that conference that Wesley College was under threat of closure.

Rachel again did us proud in 2011 when we stayed at the Maid's Head Hotel in Norwich, apparently the oldest hotel in the UK. The weather was, once again, fabulous and I just remember a day packed full of visits, all done against the backdrop of completely blue skies and sunshine. The visit to the Julian Centre stands out for me especially as it was such a peaceful place. Sally Gibbs, recalling her second conference, says "I remember waiting in the new grand foyer at Norwich Cathedral for the Dean, who was going to show us the Cathedral library. One member of the Cathedral clergy asked what collective noun should be used for a group of librarians – I suggested a 'pedant.' We went on to discuss what term could be used for a group of clergy, my idea was a 'gossip of clergy'. He already had the term ready for a collection of Deans and was delighted to tell us... a 'forest' of course!"

In 2012, we found ourselves a little closer to home for our Conference Secretary as we paid our third visit to Manchester, this time staying at Luther King House. Sadly, the weather lived up to the Manchester

reputation and we were decidedly damp as we walked around the city between the various visits to the John Rylands Library and Chetham's, where we saw the famous chained library. However, the welcome everywhere was warm, the accommodation very comfortable, and, as always, the company excellent. We also enjoyed a really informative and practical session on disaster planning and management given by Emma Dadson of Harwell Document Restoration Services.

Rain followed us in 2013 when we once again crossed the border into Scotland, staying at the Beardmore Hotel (now called the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel) in Glasgow. This was quite an adventure for me, as I had flown from Stansted Airport where I had fallen foul of the security check (I had forgotten to remove my mobile phone from the front pocket of my suitcase) and had had the entire contents of my suitcase flung out onto the table before the somewhat unpleasant airport official. I remember wondering where we were going as the hotel shuttle approached what appeared to be the main entrance of a hospital. It turned out there was a shared entrance with the Golden Jubilee Hospital.

Some of the conference is a bit of a blur as I was about to exchange contracts on the house I was hoping to move to. I remember trying to balance a mobile phone against one ear while trying to hold on to my umbrella being battered by the wind and rain and trying to make sense of what the estate agent and then solicitor was trying to tell me. However, I definitely could not forget our visit to the Glasgow School of Art and the wonderful Charles Rennie Mackintosh-designed library. How terrible to know that the amazing place was completely gutted by that dreadful fire in 2014. To help our professional development, our colleague Graham Cornish once again gave us the benefit of his expertise talking about e-copyright. I know that I was able to make good use of his advice on my return to Spurgeon's in regard to our online site.

In 2014 we returned to Sarum College, where Jenny Monds and Jayne Downey had organized a most enjoyable conference. I especially remember the trip to Winchester and especially the Winchester College Fellows' Library where we saw so many treasures (Day 2014). Sally Gibbs has a particular memory, "Out of all the conference library visits I have experienced, the artefact that has left the deepest impression was at the Winchester College Alumni Library (2014). We were shown a very rare Algonquin New Testament which early traders would have handed out to Native Americans – giving what they could not understand to people who could not read. The Winchester boys had asked if it might be sold to raise the funds to have their football

pitch astro-turfed. The librarian had replied that it was so valuable the sale would pay for the whole of Winchester to be astro-turfed, then to us he added that probably the whole of the south of England could be so treated. I barely have a memory of the book itself, it seemed small and insignificant, it was the astronomic value which astounded me. I suppose the impact was all the greater because we have had such tight budgets in recent years. While many theological libraries struggle to keep their modules resourced, some other institutions are sitting on vast, probably inestimable treasures."

For the 2015 conference I had to turn to the report in the *Bulletin* as I was enjoying the sunshine in Tuscany. From all accounts you had a great time staying at Westminster College, Cambridge, enjoying a packed programme of visits and talks all put together so well by Carol. The description of the Cambridge sunshine and the visit to Fitzwilliam College brought me full circle to that first conference I attended there in 1989.

And now here we are in Rome. So many wonderful memories – all that weather, good and bad, all those welcomes mostly warm – and even those wheelie bins!

Here's to the next however many years of the ABTAPL Spring conference. And with thanks to all those colleagues, past and present, too many to name, who have contributed so much to the conference experience.

Update : ABTAPL Conferences 2016–2025

And there we must leave Judy, raising a glass to ABTAPL in 2016. While I cannot hope to match Judy's virtuoso performance, that was, of course, not the end of the ABTAPL conference story. The *ABTAPL Bulletin* recounts in some detail the visits and sessions at the Rome 2016 conference – high points included "a visit to the Tower of the Winds, one of the most famous buildings of the Vatican, which is located on top of the archive buildings" (Linfield 2016, 28) and visits to the Biblioteca Angelica and Biblioteca Catanense, "both were slightly reminiscent of the Tardis, with unprepossessing entrances revealing amazingly rich interiors" (Warren 2016, 33). Anna Williams, in her summing up of the Rome Conference wrote: "I haven't even mentioned the drinks receptions on the roof terrace and the beautiful view from there, but I have just scratched the surface of what was an excellent conference, where I have met colleagues, struck up friendships, gained from shared thoughts and experiences, and visited amazing places – I would do it all again tomorrow" (A. Williams 2016).

Image 1: The 2016 ABTAPL Diamond Jubilee Conference group, Rome. Photo by Alan Linfield, used with permission.

I joined the 2017 Birmingham conference at Woodbrooke College, which provided us with plenty of food for thought about quality standards and what that might mean for all of our different kinds of libraries in ABTAPL. Michael Gale notes aspirations for benchmarking, or even peer assessment, within UK theological libraries (Gale 2017, 8). My lasting memory is of mealtimes at this peaceful, austere, Quaker college, where a bell rang to signal a minute's silent reflection before our meal could begin.

The 2018 Durham conference at St Chad's College made the most of Durham as a World Heritage Site, with visits to Durham Cathedral, Library and Treasures Gallery and Palace Green Library at Durham University, and it was my first time visiting Ushaw College, with its historic library and ornate chapels. Cassandra Gilbert-Ward attended (Gilbert-Ward 2018) as the recipient of the first ABTAPL student bursary, and participated in the teachmeet section about her work at the National Art Library.

2019 found ABTAPL members heading to Regent's Theological College in the Malvern hills. This conference heard Donald Mitchell speaking on rising to the challenge of supporting distance learners, and sessions on theological publishing, antiquarian book care and rare book cataloguing. Winette Field remembers "the epic view over

the valley and the remnants of snow as I approached the college. The library was approached via a tunnel which meant students did not need to cross the main road" (pers. comm., June 6, 2025). Visits included the Hive, a university/public library collaboration in which the library is run by the University but also offers public library services. Gudrun Warren reports that "one thing that does stay in my mind was at the Rome conference . . . Sally Gibbs telling us about her standing desk, and how good she found it, and then at the Malvern conference we were able to see her standing desk in situ, which struck me as a nice example of how we can help each other out of our own genuine working experience, and also the value of visits to libraries as a good way of learning" (pers. comm., June 2, 2025).

The 2020 conference was planned to be in Cardiff, capital city of Wales, with visits to the National Museum of Wales and Welsh University Special Collections. Sadly, as the conference dates of 2–4 April approached and the Covid pandemic escalated, it became clear that it could not happen as planned, and the 2020 conference was cancelled. But in 2021 the ABTAPL conference was back as a one-day only and online conference, delivered via Zoom, and Sally Gibbs reported in her Chair's report that "positive feedback" was received (Gibbs 2021).

Michael Gale remembered that the 2022 Cardiff conference "was such a positive experience – we were just happy to be meeting again after three years" (pers. comm., May 30, 2025). Winette Field remembered that "Phyllis Thompson introduced the newly reformed New Testament Church of God archive plans to the group. That was fascinating as we saw how one of the newer UK denominations was beginning to realise the need to safeguard its history" (pers. comm., June 6, 2025). In her conference report, Alison Turner pondered on Dr David McNenemy's lecture on ten types of truth in a world of post-truth and fake news (Turner 2022), welcoming the opportunity to "take a step back from everyday concerns and look at the bigger picture – knowledge as a whole and our place in it."

The 2023 Conference was in Liverpool, which as Alison Turner noted, "at that time was gearing up to host the Eurovision Song Contest in place of Ukraine" (Turner 2023). Travel arrangements were beset by some of the biggest national rail strikes in 30 years, but ABTAPL colleagues still managed to gather to enjoy session topics ranging from the theology of Doctor Who, the life and work of Prof. Andrew Walls, and user engagement at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool.

ABTAPL members and international colleagues from Atla and BETH braved the many steps and hills of Edinburgh to meet at New College

for the 2024 conference. We joined the rest of the library world in discussing what AI is and what it might mean for us, and also covered the more familiar territory of collection development and support for distance learners. Winette Field remembers that "We experimented with a panel discussion which included Ruth McDonald, chair of the Religious Archives Group and Naomi Hart, one of CILIP's 125 list of new professionals (CILIP 2023)" (pers. comm., June 6, 2025). The panel covered an array of questions on the themes of volunteer management, advocacy, off-site storage, training course recommendations and distance-learner support. A highlight for me was the conference dinner at Ciao Roma, with its Robert Louis Stevenson-themed décor complete with pirates and skeletons.

The 2025 Belfast conference was small in numbers, but perfectly formed in its programme and blessed by beautiful spring weather. With a clutch of visits to libraries including the Linen Hall Library and Queens University Belfast, the sessions had an international flavour with sessions on the International Council on Archives Section on Archives of Faith Traditions, decolonialism and religion in collections and global trends in theological and religious studies librarianship. It was also a pleasure to welcome a recipient of a free student place to the ABTAPL conference once more.

Image 2: The 2025 ABTAPL Conference group on the steps of Union Theological College, Belfast. Photo by Marni Thurm Li, used with permission.

That's forty-seven conferences and counting, which have brought ABTAPL members together, and the full list of conference locations sums up how much we have travelled over the years.[2] I hope this retrospective on the ABTAPL Spring conferences, with its history of memorable places, warm welcomes, insightful topics and quirky anecdotes encourages you to join us at an ABTAPL conference and make it part of your history.

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Appendix: List of all ABTAPL Conferences

YEAR	PLACE	
1978	Durham	
1979	Hawarden	
1980	York	
1981	Bristol	
1982	Cambridge	
1983	Edinburgh	
1984	Manchester	
1985	Chichester	
1986	Oxford	
1987	Lancaster	
1988	Lincoln	
1989	Cambridge	
1990	Birmingham	
1991	Durham	
1992	Salisbury	
1993	Glasgow	
1994	Bristol	
1995	Maynooth	
1996	Oxford	
1997	Winchester	
1998	Manchester	
1999	Cambridge	
2000	York	Took place in September following BETH conference
2001	Exeter	

YEAR	PLACE	
2002	Chester	
2003	Salisbury	
2004	Leicester	
2005	Durham	
2006	Prague	Golden Jubilee conference
2007	Edinburgh	
2008	Belfast	
2009	Oxford	
2010	Bristol	
2011	Norwich	
2012	Manchester	
2013	Glasgow	
2014	Salisbury	
2015	Cambridge	
2016	Rome	Diamond Jubilee conference
2017	Birmingham	
2018	Durham	
2019	Malvern	
2020	Cancelled due to Covid pandemic	
2021	One day only (online) due to Covid pandemic	
2022	Cardiff	
2023	Liverpool	
2024	Edinburgh	
2025	Belfast	

Notes

1   These were the Zubaran paintings (*http://aucklandcastle.org/exhibitions/zurbaran-paintings*) which the Church Commissioners were proposing to sell, but fortunately a campaign to save them led by Jonathan Ruffer raised millions. *https://aucklandproject.org/discover/the-zurbarans-of-auckland-palace/*.

2   See Appendix.

Balancing the Books

A Practical Approach to Navigating Emerging Challenges in Small Academic Theological Libraries

ANNA WILLIAMS

*C*onducted in 2017, an Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL) Benchmarking Survey highlighted that small academic theological libraries in the UK and Ireland are often run by solo librarians; with one staff member as the average number of full-time equivalent library staff of the 16 libraries surveyed (2018, slide 11). For small academic theological libraries, the ever-changing needs of their overarching institutions and the individual characteristics of the libraries, combined with the expertise and strengths of their frequently solo librarians, results in challenges being met in distinctive ways; creating these bespoke solutions can often feel like a balancing act. As Kennedy Stephens observes, "simply translating trends that may have been established in a different, larger setting to a small theological library context" (2016, 30) is not the answer. What works in one theological college may not work for another.

In addressing the challenges we face, we must consider both the broader context of issues affecting both larger libraries and similar institutions to our own, before reflecting on what best suits our own situation. To help us to "*understand* and to *translate*" (Kennedy Stephens 2016, 30), my aim is to outline some of the current challenges and suggest skills, methods, and strategies that can help us navigate not only the present landscape but future developments as well.

To source current challenges, I have examined literature about higher education (HE) libraries, small libraries, theological libraries and solo librarians as well as any information specifically from small academic theological libraries. For the purpose of this chapter, small academic theological libraries are those that consider themselves to come under this banner and self-identify as small (Kennedy Stephens 2016, 29; Ebertz and Stutzman 2020, 76).

What I have aimed to do is not to create an exhaustive list, but to gather those challenges that are the ones we really need to know about; the ones that are maybe on our minds or that we are perhaps pushing to the back of our minds. Some of the challenges have been with us for a while, while other more recent challenges are generated by trends and developments within the librarianship profession, library management or the wider world.

To discover the broader trends in university libraries, the initial documents I consulted were by professional organisations, both from the UK and Ireland, and internationally, which have produced recent reports about trends and challenges for libraries. These three reports were the SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) Report, *Mapping the Future of Academic Libraries* (Pinfield et al. 2017), the ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries*)* report *2024 Top Trends in Academic Libraries: A Review of the Trends and Issues* (ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee 2024) and the *IFLA (*International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) *Trend Report 2024: Facing the Future of Information with Confidence* (Dezuanni and Osman 2024).

The content of these reports tends to focus more on larger HE institutions, and in some cases, from other countries. As a result, they highlight challenges that I have not included; such as anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) legislation (ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee 2024, 235), which is not currently a pressing issue for libraries in the UK and Ireland, and climate change (Dezuanni and Osman 2024, 41) which small academic theological libraries are more likely to address through broader institutional initiatives. To identify

challenges more specific to the context of small academic theological libraries, I also consulted scholarly articles and publications about HE libraries in general, as well as those focusing on small libraries, solo librarianship, and theological libraries.

Artificial Intelligence

Though varied technological advances may impact small academic theological libraries, by far the most pervasive is the development of artificial intelligence (AI), and more specifically in our context, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). AI is a challenge to society as a whole and Prime Minister Keir Starmer stresses this in the *Policy Paper: AI Opportunities Action Plan* saying, "Artificial Intelligence is the defining opportunity of our generation. It is not a technology that is coming . . . It is already here", and following up with "in the coming years, there is barely an aspect of our society that will remain untouched by this force of change" (2025, para. 1–3).

There was common thinking among the three broader reports about advances in technology, and specifically that AI and AI literacy will continue to be a challenge in the coming years (Pinfield et al. 2017, 10; ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee 2024, 231; Dezuanni and Osman 2024, 19). This view is echoed from within professional librarianship in the Library and Information Association (CILIP) report, *The impact of AI, machine learning, automation and robotics on the information professions*, where CILIP's CEO Nick Poole describes us as "in the middle of a Fourth Industrial Revolution," highlighting that "Every day, the technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution – AI, machine learning, automation and robotics – are finding new applications" (2021, 5). It is for this reason that I spend a little longer discussing AI as a challenge, alongside the fact that there is a significantly large pool of scholarly reports and articles on this subject.

It is the way AI analyses text that clearly overlaps with our sphere of work. We deal with text in many formats. We organise it and support library users in accessing the content that they need and using it correctly. Cox, in the CILIP report, notes that "it is most likely the changes in how text can be processed that will impact information professional work most strongly, because historically much of our work revolves around text in various forms" (2021, 13). This report was published in 2021 and the speed at which AI has already developed can

feel dizzying. In the CILIP report, Cox states that "The ability of AI to analyse the content of texts may shift search away from being primarily through structured bibliographic databases to search of full text items or whole collections using multiple potential algorithms," and this shift is already beginning to happen (2021, 14). One recent development is that the Library of Congress is investigating whether AI can generate metadata and MARC (Machine-Readable Cataloguing) records; they are still in the experimental phase of the project, but already they are looking towards a pilot programme (Brador 2024). Another development is by a commercial digital subscription library Perlego, which has an optional "Smart Search" where you can ask a question, and it will suggest titles that may have the content you need (Perlego 2025). The Smart Search feature is currently in BETA but from my observations, it can suggest titles that are very useful and some that you would be unlikely to find using traditional search methods.

Some of us may feel cautious about becoming familiar with the AI resources within our sphere of work, perhaps feeling that it is outside our remit or that it should not have a place in scholarly thinking. However, if students are using AI tools and GenAI already, we need to be able to teach them how to use them – from the ethically-unacceptable typing their assignment title into a chatbot (such as ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot) and copying the answer, to knowing how to use a chatbot effectively to highlight trends in the research data and statistics they have collected. Cox reminds us that the "role of information professionals has always been to enable our users and communities to profit from new advances in technology and to make better use of information for their own advancement" (2021, 6).

Part of our unease may regard having protection and regulation in place. The European Union (2024) enacted "the world's first comprehensive AI law" in 2024 but the UK has no statutory regulation of AI in place yet (McCallum et al. 2024). The UK Government produced some guidance about ethics and safety (Office for Artificial Intelligence 2019) and more recently produced a white paper describing the contents as the "plans for implementing a pro-innovation approach to AI regulation" (Department for Science, Innovation and Technology 2023). It is clear there is some way to go before there is legislation in place; however, the Association of Research Libraries has produced *Research Libraries Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence*, designed as a "foundational framework for the ethical and transparent use of AI" (Association of Research Libraries 2024), and other library groups and associations are likely to follow.

It is then of no surprise that we may be wary of how to proceed in approaching AI. Cox identifies some of the many concerns that impinge upon our thinking, highlighting concerns about "artificially created life" and dystopian futures alongside the "techno-utopianism" painted by big tech companies, plus ethical questions, and concerns about the impact on jobs (2024, 1–2). There have been some concerning developments about intellectual property rights, recently with a publisher selling access to its data (Palmer 2024). There are also warnings about accuracy and misinformation (Pierce 2025). Cox further highlights the rapid speed of technological change and that all these variables must sit within government strategies and policies (2024). He finishes by saying that "in a sense responding strategically to AI is almost impossible", and it can certainly feel like that. However, the consistent recommendation in the literature, that we cannot ignore AI, is backed up by Cox, who adds that "it seems equally true that a merely passive 'wait and see' posture is inadequate" (2024, 2).

Though focused on law librarians and written some while ago in terms of advances in AI, Callister summarises the task in hand for us all: "the best we librarians can do in the face of uncertainty is to teach our users about the limitations of these systems, disillusioning them of computer intelligence doing the work for them – at least for now. If anything, AI is a tool and, one day perhaps – assuming a humanistic techno-central vision – a partner" (2020, 210). Similarly, the *Pulse of the Library 2024* report states, "The question is no longer whether to embrace AI but rather what to adopt and how to do so responsibly" (Clarivate 2024, 2).

Though incorporating AI in our work is important, it does not mean that it will be the defining challenge for small academic theological libraries, or in fact any libraries, but rather a pervasive challenge. If you have been questioning the importance of AI for libraries, this difference is key. AI is not changing everything about libraries, but it is a new tool that we need to embrace to provide a full service. This distinction is described in the SCONUL report, noting that "For libraries the question is not so much what technology will be affected, but rather what technology, if any, will remain unaffected by AI" (Pinfield et al. 2017, 1); but highlighting that "Technology trends, although attracting a lot of attention, were rarely seen by participants in our study as decisive in themselves" (Pinfield et al. 2017, 14). We need to understand what AI technology is about and bring it to sit alongside the other information literacy skills that we teach. This recommendation appears again and again. In the CILIP magazine *Information*

Professional, Carrigan states that "Ensuring that baseline level of AI literacy is important" (2023, 26); Dott and Charlton, in considering whether AI Literacy is an information skill, describe AI as "a natural extension" to their information literacy framework (2024, para. 4); Pierce asserts about AI and specifically ChatGPT that "this topic is relevant to information literacy, and we should be speaking up" (2025, 68). It is clear that this challenge is one we need to accept.

Library Services

Another challenge is the change in how libraries provide services. This is made up of a number of connected issues: the growth in digital collections, the inside-out library and the concept of the library itself.

Continuing to build digital collections and resources is something to which many of us have become accustomed. As small academic theological libraries, things were perhaps moving more slowly and steadily for us, unless fortunate enough to be partnered with a large university that shared access to all its online resources. In March 2020, Covid-19 radically changed the speed of this process for everyone. Suddenly, we had to be able to arrange access to online resources for our students (Baxter et al. 2021, 324; Cucksey et al. 2023, 1–2). This also highlighted how much we were still regarded as primarily physical spaces. Since then, the pace of change has increased, and digital content is a much greater part of the services offered. Opinions appear to be split about the future and where digitisation will end (Pinfield et al. 2017, 19). Some suggest it will be with almost all books digitised with only small special collections of printed books remaining (Askey 2023) and others see the "the digital shift not as a simple transition or replacement from analogue to digital but rather as an ongoing transformation and blending of both" (Baxter et al. 2021, 323). However, there is clear evidence that theological libraries still have a genuine need for physical collections, as library users continue to visit the library and borrow books (Van Dyk et al. 2020).

Whichever scenario comes to fruition, what we are also experiencing is a change directly related to the move to digitisation, a shift from one library model to another; from an outside-in model to an inside-out model. These distinctions have been defined by Lorcan Dempsey:

> The dominant library model of collections has been an outside-in one, where the library is buying or licensing materials from external providers

and making them accessible to a local audience . . . . In the inside-out model, by contrast, the university, and the library, supports resources which may be unique to an institution, and the audience is both local and external. (2016, 340-341)

A part of this shift is changing our position from how the user fits in with the library to how the library fits in with the user. Previously this was sometimes perceived as a battle between libraries and search engines (Ross and Sennyey 2008) but more recently we are looking at ways to fit in with all the resources available to students, for whom Google Scholar and library systems are perhaps seen on an equal footing (Oh and Colón-Aguirre 2019).

More practically it is a shift in thinking from opening times and restrictions to always available content that fits in with the user's workflow; it's a move from collection focus to user focus (Dahl 2018, 3; Dempsey 2016, 342; Pinfield et al. 2017, 5). However, these models are not mutually exclusive; rather, they complement each other. We retain what works in the outside-in library model but seek out ways to develop the inside-out model, interlacing the two into one library service: "These new services build on a foundation of traditional library services" (Dahl 2018, 18). In their research, Pinfield, Cox, and Rutter noted that the "need for libraries to move from emphasising collections to services (or at least, collections as one service amongst others) was widely acknowledged" (2017, 5). This emphasis on services spotlights our expertise as librarians; "moving from invisible to visible" as the changes "position the library staff as partners in the process of scholarly inquiry" (Dahl 2018, 3).

Dahl identifies these new inside-out services as special collections, digital scholarship, scholarly communication (institutional repository, consulting services), and data services (2018). This list can feel off-putting as it is written with large libraries in mind and Pinfield, Cox, and Rutter agree that "the extent to which this is relevant for all libraries is likely to vary" (2017, 18). However, some small academic theological libraries may already be following the inside-out model in some way, perhaps having special collections with an audience that "extends out to a wider community beyond the institution" (Dahl 2018, 6). Something that small theological libraries might consider is an institutional repository, perhaps in collaboration with other ABTAPL libraries. Dahl identifies an institutional repository "as a first step in library scholarly communication and publishing services" (2018, 13). Similarly, digital scholarship includes technical assistance and

classroom instruction, both of which may be delivered in some way by library staff (Dahl 2018, 8). For inside-out services, we need to see them through the lens of our own situation. Making the best of our collections as part of services keeps us not only as a vital part of our own institution but also contributes to the wider academic community.

Decolonising

There is a popularised quote attributed to Desmond Tutu that summarises succinctly why we should include decolonising in our collection development policies: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality" (2017).

Decolonising library collections can be traced back to at least 2011, but became more prominent by 2015 and has since gained traction within higher education in the UK (OCLC 2017, Charles 2019). It is of note that the three broader reports I consulted do not use the term decolonisation. Pinfield, Cox, and Rutter in the SCONUL Report recommend that "traditional library 'mantras'" should be questioned, one of these being, "the library is neutral" (2017, 49). Dezuanni and Osman in the IFLA Report discuss the "demand for diverse voices" (2024, 14) and the ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee discuss Critical Librarianship and "challenges librarians to take active steps toward antiracist and antioppresive practices," asserting "there are numerous opportunities for librarians to fight inequity, racism, sexism, and other problems through concrete action" (2024, 249). This omission may reflect that larger universities have already incorporated decolonising into their workflows and policies, or perhaps that different terminology such as "diversifying" and "liberating" are being used (Kamposiori 2023, 24). Janssen highlights that some "consider the term misleading as it is not possible to 'decolonize' colonial collections in the sense of removing colonial influence from them" and that "the word may suggest that colonialism belongs to the past when this is manifestly not the case" (2023, 96–97).

However, for those of us in small academic theological libraries, decolonising our collections is a current challenge. Regardless of what we call this process, there is a need to reassess our collection development policies and to consider whether our collections are balanced

or whether they embody the beliefs and formation of our institutions (Wilson 2021, 2). As highlighted by Crilly and Everitt,

> Coloniality is evident everywhere in academia, in the persistent Whiteness of institutions, including libraries; in the legacy of Eurocentric collections; the colonial roots of the academic subjects that form collections in libraries; the dominance of English language and of academic publishing centred in Europe and the US, and many other aspects of scholarly communication. (2021, xxiii)

This includes the classification systems we use, which can have in-built biases (Albright 2019; Adler 2017; O'Hara 2018), particularly so in the area of religion (Igwe and Ayandokun 2024).

Even though as librarians having a neutral stance is embedded in our thinking, neutral is no longer considered an appropriate description of libraries because it has morally ambivalent connotations and there is agreement in the literature that libraries are not neutral (Fuchs and Ball 2023, 352; Johnson 2016; Jones and Wilson 2021, 57; Quinn and Bates 2017, para. 1; Wilson 2021, 2). Johnson also evidences that even with the best intentions, people are not able to fully put their inbuilt biases aside and so cannot be neutral (2016).

The way that we implement decolonisation will differ from one institution to another, in part because there is a "lack of formal guidelines" but also because our policies and procedures and institutional needs are different (Kamposiori 2023, 26). Needham and Appleton (2025) point to three areas of significance in the success of decolonising collections – proactive librarians, critical library leadership and institutional support. We are in a unique position where we can help in motivating our institutions in their decolonising strategies and aligning with them. We should see decolonising as an ongoing feature of our collection policies, rather than "a definable, finite and measurable process, like so many processes that constitute the organisation of libraries, the implication that we can start and one day finish this project" (Crilly and Everitt 2021, xxi). We can look to other HE institutions, libraries, theological collections and perhaps collaboration with organisations such as the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL), alongside discussions and decisions within our own institutions, to guide how we approach decolonisation.

> It is not about removing white male authors from the reading list. It is about creating the space for critical analysis that can help us identify

some of the problematic assumptions that can be carried, often silently, by the materials that we use and the ways in which we teach. It is about wider engagement with theologians from around the world, who can help us identify the ways in which our voices and the voices of those we habitually engage with don't tell the whole story. And it is about encouraging students and teachers alike to address the legacies of colonialism that continue to impact people's lives today, including in the form of racism and structural inequalities. (Common Awards 2024)

Fuchs and Ball sum this up well when they consider how we should move ahead with this by saying "essentially, the answer is slowly, thoughtfully, intentionally, by honoring a variety of perspectives, and through identifying a strategic pathway towards developing the fundamental steps for success" (2023, 350).

Learning Support

One of the steadily increasing challenges faced by HE libraries is the additional learning support required by students. Recent research has highlighted the "year on year" rise in the number of students with specific learning differences (SpLD) entering HE during 2007–2019 and further notes that these students are more likely to attend "specialist HE institutions" (Brunswick et al. 2025, 2). Theological colleges are not mentioned specifically in this research (Brunswick et al. 2025, 4), but the broader term of humanities is employed, within which theology is located. Alongside the rise in students with SpLD, the ways in which we can help have also improved; the IFLA Guidelines for Making Libraries Accessible for People with Disabilities highlights that there "has been notable progress in the field of library services to persons with disabilities, particularly in the areas of assistive technology, electronic formats, and online communication tools" (Winkelstein et al. 2024, 1).

This general rise will also impact theological colleges and their libraries, but in addition to this, the higher age demographic of students attending theological colleges may add to these numbers. Whereas many universities tend to have larger numbers of enrolled students under thirty years of age, for theological and bible colleges that teach degree programmes, a larger proportion of students are over the age of thirty (HESA 2024). There is additional evidence pointing towards this different age balance for theological colleges. It has been noted that older students are actively encouraged to apply and are in significant

numbers in theological colleges (Lothian 2024). This correlates with my own experience, dealing with many students over the age of fifty and some over sixty-five.

There are different challenges in meeting the needs of an older demographic. Some of these students will not have the digital literacy required for degree-level study, perhaps having used a mobile phone or a tablet computer but not a laptop or desktop computer. Others may have last been in formal education at age sixteen and are lacking in confidence. Others were schooled at a time when learning differences such as dyslexia and dyscalculia were not routinely picked up and conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) were frequently attributed to bad behaviour. Butcher asserts the result is that "many [older students] who enter HE lack confidence and experience fragile self-esteem . . . [and] when appended to deeply held memories of ineffective learning at school, it is hardly surprising that some mature students may appear 'needy' in terms of institutional support and seem more likely to withdraw when life events disrupt their studies" (2023, 198–199).

However, we should not assume that these issues will be ongoing. Broady, Chan and Caputi undertook research into computer attitudes in older and younger adults, which concluded,

> Research has shown that negative stereotypes of older people being avoidant of technology and incapable of its use are outdated. With proper encouragement, clear explanations of the personal benefits and an appropriate time schedule, older people certainly have the potential to become equally effective in using technology and computers as younger age groups. (2010, 483)

Similarly, Staddon more recently concludes that our support "may involve giving students enough time to adapt to new technologies, particularly if they do not use it often, and potentially providing explicit training sessions on new or unfamiliar technologies" (2020, 17).

With a larger proportion of students aged thirty-plus, alongside the tendency of students with SpLD's applying to smaller specialist colleges, it is likely that there will continue to be a significant proportion of students who need targeted help in some form or another, alongside a need to elevate our knowledge about how we can help.

There are some challenges for libraries that can be felt more acutely in small academic theological libraries; these challenges, though not an exclusive list, include shrinking budgets, access to

technological advances, staffing, shifting student expectations and limited visibility.

Budget Limitations

As a profession, librarians are acutely aware that "staffing and budget make a difference in what we can offer" (Cucksey et al. 2023, 2). With these fundamental restrictions we need to ensure that we have the skills to enable us to develop creative strategies to address present and emerging issues (Gwyer 2018, 14). Restricted budgets are a given for most small academic theological libraries and we are on a much smaller scale than many of our counterparts in the United States. Kennedy Stephens (2016) and Ebertz, Young Miller, and Kennedy Stephens (2020) suggest a budget figure of under $500,000 for small theological libraries. I suspect, even including staff costs, there are many theological libraries in the UK and Ireland where the budget is not even close to a fifth of that total, though my hope is that some may be closer. Nevertheless, within our own libraries we have all learnt to be creative with the resources available to us and with the purchases we make. However, the shift to digital content and the rising costs of resources are stretching already stretched budgets and these can sometimes far exceed what our budgets can allow. Gale expresses the problem well in his discussion about the pros and cons of digital library, Perlego, stating that an "An annual subscription for all our students would wipe out the entire library budget, even at the lower rate which we have been offered" (2022, 17). It is difficult for us to keep up with informational and technological developments when we are sometimes unable to choose any of them. This still leaves us with many difficult decisions to make and more creative routes to try and stretch our budgets even further.

Solo Librarians

For solo librarians, these decisions can sometimes feel weighty, even with the support of library committees and supportive line management. Day-to-day tasks can take over the role, not allowing time for bigger projects (Gale 2020, 31; Veldheer 2024, 84). Veldheer succinctly puts the task for solo theological librarians, stating, "There is no good way to say it, but this is a big job" (2024, 79–80). Roper points out that

"every solo librarian has the opportunity to create their position, the roles and responsibilities within and the overall library vision and have a certain amount of freedom when deciding what to focus upon and how time should be spent during each working day" (2024, 82). This allows us to fulfil a role that we love and in which we want to excel, but also gives us the responsibility to continually adjust as new challenges appear. Veldheer goes on to highlight the overarching challenge for us: "Even if you are aware of another library facing a similar situation, it is important to remember that the librarian in that case is working with a distinct administration and a different collection of books compared to your own" (2024, 80). It may be that those of us who are solo librarians never think of the enormity of our responsibilities all at once, but instead focus on the broader projects and individual tasks in hand. Having recent and thorough books covering the broad scope of both theological librarianship (Veldheer 2024) and solo librarianship (Roper 2024) underscores the complexities of our roles and the challenges we face.

User Expectations

The shift towards digital has changed the way that everyone lives, and this has brought a change in library user expectations. Having been catapulted into providing a more hybrid service during Covid-19, going back to the steadier pace of change we were experiencing previously is not possible. Student and staff expectations have changed and they expect to see technology from their interactions in daily life reflected in the library services available to them. Davies contends that "when they see a news report on a new technology they think this is a promise and that it will be available on their laptop in the morning" (2012, 12). Though this sounds extreme the effect does lead to perceived barriers, such as a book being available via Amazon's Kindle but not being available as an e-book that we can provide as a library. Similarly, a book can be ordered online and arrive the next day, or even the same day, but ordering and delivery from library book suppliers can take longer. A student can print wirelessly at home but in the library, they must log in to a library computer in order to be able to print. This is described by an interviewee in Gwyer's research as "Amazon v. university infrastructure" (2018, 18). Our challenge is to "understand student expectations by listening to students – not as feedback but as part of the service development process" (Davies 2012, 12).

Visibility

The final challenge that I will highlight is about the perception of library services. Libraries can be perceived differently by those who don't work within libraries and if students and staff do not understand what the library is, we become invisible. Pinfield, Cox and Rutter recorded in their study that some participants who were not based in the library were "thinking of the library in very traditional ways" and that "There is clearly a need for libraries to communicate their current and future role better" (2017, 7). The danger of not being visible is that the library can be overlooked and undervalued with limited impact. Harland, Stewart and Bruce interviewed library directors who highlighted a possible cause of being overlooked, saying there is an "attitude that libraries and librarians always cope with whatever you throw at them and that they're good managers and they do very well in their universities, therefore you don't have to pay attention to them" (2017, 403). Being comfortable with the status quo or being resistant to change are potentially routes for the library to be less effective.

Practical and Tactical Approaches

In considering the challenges I have highlighted as particularly relevant to our context as small academic theological libraries, it is clear that addressing them is far from straightforward. Some challenges appear to demand budgets well beyond what we have available to us; others seem to require significant time, while we are already operating at full capacity; some are so complex that we may worry we will not fully understand them. At times, the scale of these challenges can feel overwhelming, and the rapid pace of change in this "Fourth Industrial Revolution" can feel like it's leaving us behind (Cox 2021, 5). Nevertheless, as Murray reminds us, "The librarian must not only stay abreast (or ahead) of changes in the information landscape, but must help reluctant end users to navigate these changes while keeping up with their primary job responsibilities" (2018, 4).

Leadership

Leadership is seen as a vital part of being a librarian, not only for those in roles such as heads or directors of library services but on

all levels: "The information professional in a small special library needs leadership and management skills just as much as his or her counterparts in larger libraries, but the emphasis and the way these skills are applied will differ" (Murray 2018, 5). Furthermore, one of the four contexts for our professional future introduced by CILIP is leadership (CILIP 2025). In this context their "members will move from 'Information Managers to Information Leaders' – enabling their users, communities and organisations to harness the power of information, knowledge and data to fulfil their potential" (CILIP 2025).

Le's survey of 38 senior leaders from medium and large American academic libraries identified the leadership skills they considered most important (2015). The responses were gathered into 10 areas: vision; management skills; integrity; collaboration; communication skills; mentorship; professional development; apprenticeship; leadership roles; self-awareness (Le 2015, 306–308). This is a long and daunting list, however Le goes on to point out that "many of these leadership attributes can be developed or acquired through professional development, advanced studies, mentorship [being mentored], leadership roles in learned and professional societies, and apprenticeship [experience]" (2015, 312).

Leadership is what is going to carry us through the challenges ahead. It will help us with the creativity and vision to effectively navigate our way through the current challenges, to inspire those around us to do similarly and to demonstrate to the wider organisation the "changing yet important role that libraries and librarians have in advancing learning and research" (Le 2015). I will return to this subject in the next section.

The growing emphasis on soft skills and emotional intelligence in leadership has brought the concept of kind leadership to the fore and this has been suggested as a way forward for librarians. Rimmer in her book *The Kind Librarian* states that the "future of library leadership is being shaped by a confluence of technological advancements and evolving societal needs. To navigate this landscape effectively, library leaders must integrate emerging trends with foundational principles of kindness and wellbeing" (2024, 257).

Professional Membership and Professional Currency

Joining a professional body gives you access to resources and professional standards, opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, to

communicate with other professionals and to contribute to the wider profession. For any librarian, it is important to connect with other professionals, but for solo librarians it is vital to make these connections to meet the challenges discussed in this chapter and to grow as a professional.

ABTAPL provides members with access to e-books for professional development, the ABTAPL *Bulletin* is published three times a year, there is the more informal monthly lunchtime "ABchaTL" online meetings, which is an ideal place to catch up with members from other libraries plus an online discussion list where you can request interlibrary loans, share information or start a discussion. ABTAPL also offers regular training opportunities, both at the biannual in-person meetings and through online sessions, at little or no cost. These online options help remove common barriers such as time constraints and travel expenses. There are also opportunities to take on a role on the ABTAPL committee. The partnerships between ABTAPL and other theological library associations, Atla in America and BETH (*Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie*) in Europe, mean that there are opportunities to receive funding to attend their annual meetings and benefit from seeing theological librarianship in other locations. Atla and BETH also produce professional literature and resources, including open access e-books. Even considering only the resources available within our specialised sphere of theological librarianship, there are a wealth of resources that can support us in building our leadership and management skills.

With a wider scope for all information professionals, membership of CILIP also provides valuable benefits. There are a myriad of training opportunities and resources, the opportunity to become professionally accredited, discounts on books and multiple special interest groups with online discussion lists, where you can connect with others who share the same interests. Similarly, the Library Association of Ireland (LAI) provides opportunities for networking, professional development and specialist groups. Additionally, CILIP and LAI have a joint annual conference this year providing a forum for wider learning and sharing.

There are other ways to "stay informed through subscribing to listservs, forums, blogs, library news, and online journals" (Veldheer 2024, 84). Membership in a professional association provides a strong foundation for staying up-to-date and is key to connecting with other professionals. Development opportunities can be arranged around your own schedule, perhaps reading posts to the online discussion list as your first job of the day, or scheduling time in your calendar once a fortnight to check if there are any new learning opportunities from

the email subscriptions you have received. By prioritising professional activities, you will be better equipped to tackle future challenges, as this "remains crucial for your ongoing professional development and keeping up with current library trends" (Veldheer 2024, 91).

Collaboration

The need for librarians to collaborate to tackle the challenges ahead is stressed in the literature: "For academic libraries, effective collaboration is no longer an option but a necessity" (Atkinson 2019, 1); "For us to survive and thrive as individual libraries and librarians, we must work together" (Adams, 2021, 16); "The need to handle all library responsibilities alone makes it necessary for the solo librarian to build a network and create their own professional support system" (Veldheer 2024, 80); "Collaboration is one of the key abilities to manage change effectively" (Aslam 2020, 143).

There are already examples of collaboration among theological libraries in the UK, such as interlibrary loans via the ABTAPL discussion list, discounted journal prices through ABTAPL membership and the collaboration between the Church of England and Durham University, which has produced a shared online resource of e-books and eJournals, contributed to and accessed by theological colleges. ABTAPL itself is an embodiment of collaboration, with the committee and membership made up of librarians and those with an interest in the subject areas.

In his paper *A Collaborative Future within Atla*, Adams reviews the history of collaboration within Atla and then suggests numerous ways that Atla can collaborate to achieve success (2021). With the current challenges we are facing there are also many possibilities for us to collaborate so we may continue to thrive. Highlighted as areas for collaboration are "collection development, access/preservation, and information literacy – where theological librarians have collaborated before, and where they should collaborate again, but with a strategic vision" (Adams 2021, 32).

There will be similar areas where ABTAPL or small groups of libraries with similar needs might collaborate. Atkinson warns that "Many current issues and developments on the horizon are too large and complex for any department or library to deal with on their own" (2019, 1). Now is the time to look at how we can support each other, and the gains, as well as the obvious time-saving and money-saving aspects

that might "increase the profile, visibility, credibility, and influence of the library and library staff internally and externally, beyond the existing user base" (Atkinson 2019, 3).

In addition to these external collaborations, we should be looking out for opportunities for internal partnerships within our institutions. Collaboration with students has been a recent development, improving information literacy through open pedagogy (ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee 2024, 232; Fields and Harper 2020); "Open pedagogy requires students to be actively involved in the design, creation, and curation of OER [Open Educational Resource] learning materials through renewable assignments" (ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee 2024, 232).

Practical Strategies for Day-to-Day Impact

When reading literature on library management and related topics, I sometimes find myself thinking that the recommended actions aren't realistic for my situation, either because I don't have the time to implement them or the capacity to re-skill. I have encountered similar challenges in day-to-day library work, noticing tasks that clearly need attention but lacking the time to get them started.

Over the years, I have developed a few practical tactics that help me make progress without requiring large blocks of time. While I continue to rely on overarching strategies such as leadership, professional membership, staying professionally current, and collaboration, these additional, smaller-scale tactics have proven valuable in helping me move things forward.

Workstyle

Working in small academic theological libraries gives us the advantage of agility and we can often adapt our routines more easily than those in larger institutions. However, I often find that I am juggling multiple tasks at once. For years, I questioned whether I was doing something wrong, but I have come to realise that the nature of my role, combined with my particular skills and experience, makes this multitasking both necessary and appropriate. My desk is located within the library itself, which makes me highly accessible, and our policies

are centred around student needs and together these naturally shape the way I work each day.

It is interesting to note at this point that the literature showed different viewpoints on this type of working. Ebertz and Stutzman warn against tending "to urgent matters rather than what is truly important" (2020, 122), while Veldheer suggests "When faced with myriad tasks, focus on the most immediate of the needs . . . there isn't anyone else you can hand tasks off to" (2024, 83).

It is clear that situational factors play a significant role in this. My approach is simply this: do what works best for you. Whatever your preferred working style, as long as you are reflecting on your practice, open to exploring other approaches, and staying on top of your responsibilities, there is no need to make a change to your workstyle.

Making Small Changes and Incremental Improvements

As I go about my work, I am on the lookout for any small improvements I can make, or I can carry out a small part of a larger task. An example of this is the condition of library books. Some of our books are quite old and as I shelve books or help someone find a book, if I see a book that has become very brown with age or is looking tattered, I will pull the book off the shelf, and we will order a new copy to replace it. We don't have the budget or the time to replace all the worn books at once, but steadily, over the years I have been doing this, and the collection has begun to look newer and the books more enticing to read. In a similar vein we are replacing our old spine labels, which are faded and too small to read. As these books are returned, we re-label the worst ones a few at a time. The effect of these small actions is to steadily improve the condition of the collection over time. Veldheer notes something similar, "Because you are on your own, do the best you can to break each goal down into steps. Each of those steps can become a benchmark for achievement and help you measure your overall progress. Sometimes it will be hard for you to step back and realize you have actually been moving forward in pursuit of your goals because you may have to move slowly. But you are making progress" (2024, 81).

Making Things "Good Enough"

As information professionals, we often have a keen eye for detail and a natural inclination toward order and organisation. For a long time in my work, I aimed for what I believed was the perfect way to do things. However, as the challenges have grown, particularly with the shift to digital, it has become increasingly difficult to complete tasks to that ideal standard and I found this pursuit of "perfection" was not sustainable. I have come to understand that perfection is subjective. In our context, striving for excellence means aiming for what is "good enough" to meet our specific needs. In that sense, perfection is not about flawlessness but about delivering quality that serves our purpose effectively.

Each of these and other similar suggestions can make an overall difference to your workload; "Anything you can do to lighten your workload allows you to focus on higher-priority responsibilities" (Veldheer 2024, 83).

Conclusion

Rimmer provides a contented picture through "kind" lenses:

> These emerging trends paint a picture of a dynamic future in library leadership, demanding adaptability, digital proficiency, inclusivity and a strong focus on sustainability and well-being. By staying true to their core values, library leaders can steer their institutions through this changing landscape, ensuring that libraries remain essential, responsive and inclusive community resources. (2024, 258)

While Kennedy Stephens observes doubtfulness in the form of "a pervasive sense of skepticism, and questioning whether the small theological library is capable of adopting, adapting to, or developing trends" (2016, 29).

I selected the challenges that I believe may have the greatest impact, but there are challenges that I did not discuss at all, or perhaps made only a brief reference, such as the "McDonalidisation" of libraries, hybrid work environments, climate change, virtual places, open pedagogy and open access publishing, student wellbeing, and controlled digital lending, to name just a few. Whatever the challenges, we will not be able to thrive if we ignore them, and we cannot take them on

without adapting them to our own situation first (Kennedy Stephens 2016, 32): "Successful organizations are constantly evaluating and adjusting their priorities. In turn, the successful information professional will . . . strive to stay informed of these shifts and align library services with them" (Murray 2018, 6).

I'd like to close with a quotation from the late Donald J. D. Mitchell, a longstanding member of ABTAPL. Although he wrote these words in the context of challenges faced in service provision for distance learners, they remain just as relevant to the challenges we face today (2020, 85):

> All of this is only achievable if we are seen by our institutions and faculty as partners in the educational process and not merely technical support ancillary, and inferior to, the business of teaching. If a theology department or seminary is truly committed to preparation for a life of ministry, it must see the requirement not simply to provide foundations in theology but to equip the students to be life long learners with skills of criticality with respect to the information environment and understanding of the range and validity of sources they face. Librarians bring skillsets that support and develop such understanding as fellow educationalists and with a rich resource of experience and practice mediated through professional organisations like ABTAPL and Atla and through professional literature of the sort I have cited here. Can I encourage you all ... to lobby for this recognition (if you do not already have it) within your own institutions?

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A Cathedral Perspective on Theological Libraries

GUDRUN WARREN

*T*his chapter will consider the particular situation of cathedral libraries, focusing mainly on the Church of England with reference also to the Church in Wales. Cathedrals present a unique environment. Each is an independent body outside the diocesan structure but intimately connected with it, and while cathedrals may appear to present a homogenous grouping, in fact each cathedral is unique in its context, history and the way those factors affect its contemporary life. I will introduce some of these issues, and then consider current pressures and priorities affecting cathedrals generally. The libraries that operate within the wider cathedral context face distinctive challenges, and after exploring these I will discuss some examples of successful strategies employed by individual cathedrals. Finally, the relationship between ABTAPL and cathedral libraries will be considered: not all cathedrals have libraries which fall within the remit of ABTAPL, so only a small number of cathedrals are mentioned specifically in what follows. The cathedrals mentioned were selected for a number of reasons. Cathedrals currently or recently members

of ABTAPL were approached directly to explore their experience and their relationship with ABTAPL. An email to all cathedral libraries elicited responses from other cathedrals which do not have a relationship with ABTAPL but did see something in their recent work that spoke to the issues to be raised in this chapter. I am very grateful to all those colleagues who generously gave their time and experience towards this endeavour.

Cathedral libraries appear as they do today because of centuries – and occasionally millennia – of historical development. Libraries have been integral to the functioning of cathedrals since their foundation, providing service books – liturgical and biblical – to support worship, as well as theological works for contemplative reading (particularly in the monastic foundations). Books were produced in and for the cathedral's monastic and clerical communities. Monks and clergy figured amongst the students of the earliest universities, and monastic institutions would expect to see the books provided to support university education return to the monastery when the monk finally achieved the end of his university career. Depredations such as at the Reformation and dissolution of monasteries turned the focus of scholarly collections away from church institutions to private collections, or created a new impetus for university collections. In the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, efforts renewed to reconnect cathedrals with clerical education, with theological colleges being established in close proximity to cathedrals. All of this history has left its mark on cathedral collections, and individual stories can be traced today in the current nature of specific cathedral libraries.

Contemporary cathedral libraries face particular issues arising from their situation within a place of worship that is also a visitor attraction. The worshiping life includes its daily round of services through which it develops a ministry both to occasional or one-off worshippers and to regular congregations. This includes morning and evening prayer (or Evensong) daily, a daily celebration of the Eucharist, Sunday services, and, since Covid, there are those who participate through online streaming of services. There is no day of the year when Norwich Cathedral holds no form of worship. A period during the first Covid lockdown when all churches were closed represented the first time closure happened since the early thirteenth century. This may be why that experience affected such places of worship and impacted the wider community so deeply. The legacy of those days only five years ago continues to affect cathedrals, although perhaps not consciously as a feature of daily planning.

The other side of a cathedral's role as a place of worship is through its status as the seat of the Bishop, its position outside the parochial system, and its profile as a regional centre for the established church. This brings certain diocesan services such as Chrism eucharists and ordinations, but also regional and national services: high-profile memorial services, distribution of Maundy money,[1] regional and national commemorations, carol services for schools and organisations, as well as huge and, currently, increasing congregations at the cathedral's own carol services.

Alongside this fundamental element of the life and work of a cathedral is its ministry to visitors. Much current thinking regards how visitors may arrive as tourists, but we seek to inspire them to leave as pilgrims, enunciating an understanding of the nature of the place and its potential for positively impacting those who arrive. The language of pilgrimage has been present in cathedral ministry for the majority of their history. It was an integral part of pre-Reformation life and part of the revival of consideration of cathedrals and their ministry, initiated a century ago by the publication of a seminal work by Frank Bennett, then Dean of Chester (Bennett, 1925). More recently, the work of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture at the University of York has undertaken research which has guided thinking and policy in cathedral studies. The current interest in pilgrimage stems from two main sources: the desire to express a sense of the spiritual without specifically relating that to a particular faith or denomination, leading cathedrals and other Church of England churches to stress the spirituality of the building and the importance of the sacred space; and mental health and well-being agendas which promote walking and visiting places of cultural heritage, enabling cathedrals to position themselves as departure points or destinations for such walks. The British Pilgrimage Trust is a leader in this area at present.

The need to raise funds for the maintenance of these historic buildings and for the continuation of their daily work has become a more acute issue over the last twenty years, as sources of government funding have reduced. Some cathedrals' extreme financial difficulties have been significant in the development of a new Cathedrals Measure in 2021, in accordance with which cathedrals have revised governance and implemented new structures and checks. This has led to a sense of a shift within cathedrals to even more focus on finances which, whilst essential to the continued good management of cathedrals as organisations, has also inevitably led to some level of questioning of the money-making capacity of all areas of cathedral life. Cathedrals,

in this as in all other areas of life, are not a monolithic group; different cathedrals derive their income, or relative proportions of it, from different sources. Norwich Cathedral was recently cited as having the greatest value of assets, largely because it has a property portfolio retained over centuries (Ashworth 2023). In contrast, new cathedrals established in the twentieth century often find themselves without any such endowment. Some longer-established cathedrals also find themselves in difficulties, with Peterborough Cathedral (founded as a monastic community in 654 AD) announcing recurring financial problems as recently as January 2025 (Jones 2025). Cathedrals which are established tourist attractions draw large amounts of income from such visitors, and set entrance fees in order to capitalise on this interest; they suffered significant loss of income during the Covid lockdowns and recovery period.

Historically, about half of the cathedrals of England and Wales (differences pertain in Scotland and Northern Ireland) derive from monastic foundations. The others were secular; secular in this context indicates a foundation other than a monastery, such as a college of priests. Norwich Cathedral is one of those which began life as a Benedictine priory, and it continues today to seek inspiration and guidance from that heritage in the shaping of the life and work of the cathedral. We relate our work to the three Benedictine areas of worship, hospitality, and learning, although all three areas differ from the monastic equivalent, as the cathedral interprets them in the context of engagement with the contemporary world. Whilst this structure offers a clear conceptual space in which the library can function within the wider life of the cathedral, it also highlights that the position of the library in a modern cathedral is very different from that of the monastic library. Cathedral libraries continue to function as places of study and research, but they now also provide opportunities for visitor attraction and interaction, drawing people into an encounter and prolonging the time they stay at the cathedral. Libraries often perform their functions in subtle ways that underlie rather than lead the cathedral agenda. This fact is illustrated by the academic literature about cathedrals; libraries are not mentioned in the majority of significant books about the work of cathedrals to have been published in the last twenty years (for example, Dyas 2021; Dyas and Jenkins 2021; Francis 2015; Muskett 2019; and Platten and Lewis 1998, 2006); in the *Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, cathedral libraries receive only a passing reference in the chapter on special libraries (Meadows 2006).

Cathedral libraries are as varied as the cathedrals within which they are located. Some are important historical collections, firmly rooted in the institution; some suffered more than others at the Reformation and dissolution of the monasteries; some did not even exist at the time of the Reformation; some cathedrals have no library. The larger and more significant collections tend to be historical rather than modern, and to lean towards academic areas such as history, literature and art history rather than theology. There are, almost inevitably, pockets within cathedral collections of theological work – the historic collection at Norwich Cathedral is probably around 60% theology – but because the collections have largely been developed by donation – individual works or entire libraries – they reflect the interests of the donors. Even if these donors were clergymen, then bearing in mind the clergy must have attended university, they represent an educated part of society and their tastes were typically much wider ranging than just theology. Where cathedral libraries are collecting modern texts today, these are often more geared towards supporting aspects of understanding the life and work of the cathedral: history, architecture, art history; rather than pursuing theological studies, which apparently tend to happen elsewhere.

There is a perception that clergy will automatically look towards the cathedral to seek resources for study and learning. This may stem from a move in the early twentieth century to reinvigorate relationships between cathedrals and their dioceses, pursued in a variety of ways. The establishment of theological colleges in or near cathedrals (see below) aimed to encourage clergy to see the cathedral as a resource for theological study. Having a member of diocesan clergy as a Canon Residentiary aimed to enable more integrated working and understanding – at Norwich, for example, the Rev. John Bowers held concurrently the positions of Bishop of Thetford, Archdeacon of Lynn and Canon Residentiary (1910–1926). More recently, a member of diocesan clergy sits on chapter to represent the College of Canons. However, these moves do not inherently lead the clergy to expect to seek theological library resources at a cathedral. This is compounded by alumni access to university library facilities, presence of a diocesan library (another story in itself, but one that will be referred to again in this chapter), purchasing of own books, or decline in reading.[2] Despite there being little apparent call from the clergy for access to theological resources at a cathedral library, the perception persists at least among some deans and chapters that this is a resource that the cathedral ought to provide, and once available, miraculously clergy will flood to

avail themselves of the opportunity. In my experience – corroborated by other cathedral librarians – this is not the case. Norwich Cathedral library has some devoted clergy users, regular borrowers who are delighted to have the access to a theological library, and are very happy to support it financially through the (modest) annual subscription. However, many clergy feel no incentive to investigate the facilities, and even when it is brought directly to their attention, it simply does not fit in with their way of life and study. This discrepancy creates a potential for tension between the strategic thinking of a chapter and the reality as perceived by operational staff.

Modern theological collections often sit alongside historic collections that include, but are likely not limited to, theological texts, and the varying needs of both collections are an active part of the librarian's work. Book collections at cathedrals have tended to grow largely by donation, either of individual items, or of complete libraries; so, for example, the largest collection within the library of Canterbury Cathedral comprises the libraries of an archbishop and his personal secretary (Canterbury Cathedral 2025; Fremantle and Herring 2004). The library at St Edmundsbury Cathedral is a parish library developed by Dr. Miles Mosse for the then parish church of St James, in order to be a resource for training clergy, but includes other works such as histories and a cosmology (Dart, n.d.). Norwich Cathedral's historic collection includes donations from an individual whose interests were largely antiquarian and literary, and from a clergyman whose major interest outside theology was in classical literature. Historic collections, therefore, are not solely theological, and are used, insofar as they are used at all, for the multifarious purposes that the diverse nature of the collections encourages.

Many cathedral collections are not well used at all: visibility of collections is an issue, unless the collections are large enough to have achieved inclusion in the union catalogue Library Hub Discover (Jisc, n.d.).[3] This resource does provide access to a specific element of cathedral libraries, through the inclusion of pre-1701 foreign imprints in cathedral libraries from the Cathedral Libraries Catalogue; the catalogue is also accessible through CERL (McLeod et al. 1984). Cathedral libraries were also surveyed for the compilation of the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC 2025) and the Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (ISTC 2016), making other pockets of their collections discernible to a wider audience. Otherwise, catalogue access is very much on an individual cathedral basis, and dependent on the resources – financial and professional – of each individual cathedral.

The modern collections that may sit alongside rare books collections tend to have developed to interpret the cathedral, its buildings, life and work, and so likely represent history, art history and architecture. Some (few) cathedrals have a specific modern theology collection, for example Hereford, Durham and Norwich. Much of Hereford's library activity is driven by its two great collection highlights: the Mappa Mundi, with its related exhibition, and the Chained Library. The current librarian at Hereford Cathedral describes the modern collection as "theology, but as broad as it can be." Much of the collection development is focused on supporting and interpreting the Mappa Mundi – geography, cartography, bibliography – or to build some sense of continuation of the Chained Library – theology and geography. The library is open to the public, and encourages use by students and scholars, perceiving itself to be a space where theology may be encountered, even by those not immediately seeking it (Jennifer Dumbelton, Zoom conversation, December 3, 2024). The modern collection at Norwich is unusual in its size, as it includes the library of a former theological college which was closed in 1995; the books came to Norwich Cathedral in 2003. Durham Cathedral's Sharp Library was established by the Lord Crewe charity as a lending library of modern theology. Salisbury Cathedral library has good links with Sarum College Library, a centre for theological learning and ministry training situated in Salisbury Cathedral Close, which maintains a working library for the use of its students. Salisbury Cathedral library ceased to operate as a theological library some years ago, but the reciprocal relationship with Sarum College ensures that the college can refer historical questions to the cathedral and the cathedral can refer modern theological needs to the college (Emily Naish and Anne Dutton, Zoom conversation, January 8, 2025).

A further model is exemplified by the library of St Davids Cathedral in Wales, where the Library Development Officer actively encourages a view of the library as a hub for information. In her words, "joined up thinking doesn't just happen, it takes work" (Mari James, pers. comm. December 11, 2024). Readers are welcome to consult the physical collections, but the library places an emphasis on signposting to other relevant resources. This is partly necessitated by alienation of collections – a number of cathedral libraries (typically historic rather than modern theological collections) have been relocated to university libraries, often then retained as specific collections within the university's Special Collections. Examples include Bangor Cathedral (Wales), now in Bangor University, whilst Ripon Cathedral's collection is in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds. It also demonstrates

a fundamental principle of librarianship, that librarians seek to unite information seekers with the information that they seek. That may not be represented within the library which they have visited, but part of honouring cathedral libraries as living libraries, not merely a visitor attraction, is that the library staff perform the function of assisting such enquiries.

Canterbury and Winchester both report their modern collections as being largely interpretative of the buildings and historic collections, but each also has a further story to tell about seeking appropriate library expression within the cathedral context; that of Canterbury will be told later in this chapter. The user base of Winchester's library is primarily academic; alongside this there is a commitment to build a collection to be available for volunteers to consult. Volunteers are fundamental to the running of every cathedral, widening the cathedral's capacity to offer a range of services that might otherwise not be possible. The cathedral can offer its volunteers a fulfilling engagement with the cathedral and a sense of achievement in furthering its mission. The cathedral then supports its volunteers to perform their roles, as Winchester is demonstrating in its commitment to developing library resources for volunteers. Volunteers may not be carrying out academic research, but need to consult or reference things to improve their understanding. The library at Winchester was located on the triforium, along with the archive collection. The triforium was redeveloped as a permanent exhibition "Kings and Scribes", with a grant from the then Heritage Lottery Fund; the project was carried out 2014–2019. The archive was deposited with the Hampshire Record Office; the library was dispersed and stored in locations across the cathedral's estate. At the point of writing, a singular space for the storage and access of the collections has not been achieved and work is ongoing to develop the modern reference collection strategy (Eleanor Swire, Zoom conversation, January 6, 2025).

The Winchester experience illustrates the issue of space within a cathedral setting. Cathedrals tend to be one of the largest buildings in their cities, but the space available for ancillary activities can often be limited and under significant pressure. The issue at Winchester is lack of accessible space for the books, compounded by lack of reading room – the two usually share a single space, although this is not always the case. But with neither, there is very little scope for making the books accessible. For other cathedrals, the space may be dedicated, but its location can have profound effects on the way the library can be used and how it interacts with the rest of the cathedral and its life.

The library at St Davids is on an upper floor above a chapel dedicated to St Thomas Becket. The library is not physically visible from the cathedral, but access has to be maintained sensitively; for example, library visitors cannot be sent out into the cathedral in the middle of a funeral (Mari James, email, December 11, 2024). The lack of visibility is mitigated at St Davids by library display cases in the north transept of the cathedral, highlighting the existence of the collection (Mari James, Zoom conversation, December 18, 2024). Access to the library spaces is often limited physically because its only ingress is via a spiral staircase, and because the staircase is accessed from a cathedral transept, so services must be taken into consideration; similar access pertains at both Salisbury and Wells. The libraries at Norwich and Hereford are both accessed independently of the cathedral, but this limits their visibility, and the ease of visitor flow. This situation is not always completely negative, as the library does not necessarily want all cathedral visitors to come in.

For those libraries that do maintain significant modern collections as well as historic collections, the librarian's energies become split between two very different collection management styles. The historic collection needs to be passed on to our successors – it represents something of the history of the cathedral and the people who have interacted with it. For St Davids Cathedral library, this means recognizing the environmental impact of visitors in the library. For instance, an open library session raises the relative humidity in the library by 3 or 4%, so the library is given rest days in between open days (Mari James, Zoom conversation, December 18, 2024). At Salisbury Cathedral, the number of people at any one time is strictly controlled within the limited space of the library (Emily Naish and Anne Dutton, Zoom conversation, January 8, 2025).

Modern theology collections are typically not, as a whole, intended for preservation; some items will necessarily be disposed of as part of overall collection management. Access to the collections varies – at Norwich, the modern theology collections are freely accessible for browsing, whereas access to the historic collection is managed by appointment for researchers, supervised access for group visits, or exhibitions curated by library staff. These activities are more labour-intensive than the freer access allowed for the modern collections, so although the modern collection is three times the size, the staff time allocated to its management is considerably less.

Cathedrals have varying relationships with local higher education establishments. At Durham, the modern theological collection

provides one point of connection between cathedral and university, as the Sharp Library is open to university staff and students both as study space and to borrow books using the Durham University Campus card. York Minister has a librarian jointly funded by the University of York, with a role in both institutions; university students are encouraged to access the collections, and the Minster library collection is accessible via the University of York library catalogue. At Norwich, the relationship between university and cathedral library is less formal, although since the inception of a Library Advisory Committee, there has always been representation on that Committee from the library of the University of East Anglia (UEA). On a departmental level, the best relationships between the university and Norwich Cathedral library over the last twenty years have developed with the School of Literature and Creative Writing. Joint ventures have included student presentations responding to a sculpture in the cathedral; BA and MA teaching sessions using early modern books from the collection; library visits by CHASE students; and engagement with the labyrinth, led by the cathedral librarian, for students on health courses.

Most cathedrals provide learning to a range of target audiences over a wide age range, varying from informal to formal. Many of these opportunities are developed separately from library provision; most cathedrals have a team dedicated to work with schools, families and young people. More proximity of interest with the work of cathedral libraries may lie in the area of adult education. Both St Paul's Cathedral (2025) and Westminster Abbey (2025) run institutes devoted to public engagement offering a theological perspective on contemporary issues. St Albans Cathedral (2024a) has another example of a full adult learning programme including talks, workshops and reading groups. A more formal offering is the certificate in theology (St Albans Cathedral Certificate in Theology 2024b). Norwich Cathedral was inspired by the model provided by St Albans Cathedral when devising its programme of theological teaching, which operates under the title of Norwich Centre for Christian Learning, or NCCL (Norwich Cathedral, n.d.). This is very much an initiative of the Norwich Cathedral Library, offering theological education in an area which has no university-level theological teaching. There is no formal curriculum or assessment, but anyone can sign up for a single session or for as many as are on offer. The teaching takes place in the library; NCCL learners are encouraged to use the library, and some library users enroll in NCCL sessions, but any such reciprocal relationship is encouraged implicitly rather than being in any way enforced.

Another potential relationship for cathedral libraries is with Church of England ministry training. The zeal of reformers that affected the Church of England in the nineteenth century sought to bring cathedrals and dioceses closer together through the training of diocesan clergy (Burns 1999, 146). This was intended as beneficial to both parties: reawakening the sense of the cathedral as a centre of learning, whilst improving the education of the clergy. The endeavour waned, more rapidly in some places than others (Anna James, pers. email, March 10, 2025), and subsequent changes to ministerial education have almost completely overtaken such relationships. A phase of developing diocesan libraries distinct from cathedral libraries ensued, followed by a depletion in the number of those diocesan libraries now remaining. Those cathedrals with a modern theological collection aim to advertise their availability to ministerial candidates as a supplementary resource to their official library provision. The following examples demonstrate creative thinking to engage with diocesan clergy.

At Norwich, the local ministry training takes place in the library for portions of the academic year. The aim is to embed the library in the consciousness of ministerial candidates, lay and ordained; inevitably the impact is partial, as some people embrace the resource whilst others remain unmoved (as do the books). Over the last twenty years, Norwich Cathedral Library has participated in diocesan lay and clergy training days, presented at local ministry course summer schools, and offered a Quiet Day package to diocesan clergy. All Diocese of Norwich curates are offered a placement at the cathedral which includes a visit to the library to learn more about its work. Local ministry students have some of their teaching in the library and have their library subscription paid for them for the duration of their studies. Diocesan directors of ordinands have encouraged those discerning a vocation to visit the library to find appropriate reading; a seminar-style discussion group for curates in conjunction with the cathedral and more specifically the library has also been trialled.[4] All these efforts yield some reward, and those clergy who do discover the library tell us that it is an invaluable resource.

A partnership approach was developed in Canterbury when, in 2003, a new library – St Augustine's Library – was opened in a building owned by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury. The library was a partnership between Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Foundation and Canterbury Christ Church University. Books were provided from the former St Augustine's training college, and from Canterbury Christ Church University. The library survived for about ten years before

closure. Location can be vital to the success of such a project: in this case, the building lay between the cathedral precincts and the town, not closely associated physically with any of the participating bodies, and was not very visible. Longer term legacies of the project include development of positive relationships and continued use of books, as some were absorbed into the main Canterbury Christ Church University library. (Cressida Williams, Zoom conversation, February 27, 2025).

Durham Cathedral has also actively engaged with library provision for diocesan audiences. The Lord Crewe charity provides two theological libraries known as the Sharp libraries in the northeast of England, one in the Diocese of Newcastle's Church House, the other at Durham Cathedral (Lord Crewe's Charity 2025). In the past, the Durham Cathedral team endeavoured to connect diocesan audiences with the cathedral's Sharp Library, in line with the aspirations of the charity. This was not seen as successful: the target audiences were likely to be put off by parking constraints and had more convenient access to resources via the Religious Resources Centre at Cuthbert House, the Durham diocesan office. The Sharp Library is well-used by other audiences, in particular providing a popular resource for Durham University students of theology by introducing them to the cathedral community, a benefit shared by few other cathedrals. The cathedral is now concentrating its modern library outreach on the cathedral community, ensuring that it has the resources required to support its vision and strategy. Much of this growing audience is diocesan, and includes the cathedral's curate. (Alison Cullingford, Zoom conversation, January 3, 2025).

Hereford Cathedral has a modern theological collection which operates as a loan collection, although the majority of readers use it as a reference collection. Hereford reports similar experiences with lack of use by ordinands and clergy; the feeling is that clergy tend to amass their own libraries. There is a diocesan library for Hereford diocese, although this has been diminished and now occupies a single room in a community building in Ludlow. It does signpost users to the Cathedral library, demonstrating the attempt to provide publicity and connection between the various relevant collections. A further observation relating to the lack of use by clergy is simply the general decline in use of libraries, especially as resources to give access to books (Jennifer Dumbelton, Zoom conversation, December 3, 2024).

One phenomenon reported by both Hereford and Norwich is a recognition that the library reading room is increasingly being used as study space rather than as a place to access the library collection.

Theology is not a popular subject, but the sense of an appealing place in which to work seems to have grown, particularly since the Covid lockdowns. In part, this seems to be related to an increase in working from home: popular though this has proved, people need a variety of places in which to work so that they are not only in one and the same place all the time. A desire to find other appropriate working spaces has led some people to discover cathedral libraries. At the same time, public libraries become busier with alternative activities. The Millennium library in Norwich offers many community activities and is, furthermore, a popular haunt for local school children at the end of the school day. The cathedral library, on the contrary, offers usually a quieter space – quieter, not silent: this has been an issue reported by several cathedral libraries. Those with whom I have communicated tend not to offer "silent" study space: Durham Cathedral on its literature about the Sharp Library specifically notes that "The Sharp Library is (as you will have noticed) in a museum – it may be noisy during busy times, school visits, or guided tours. We're sorry for any disruption" (Durham Cathedral 2025). Norwich Cathedral has occasional issues when users advocate for greater levels of silence than are practicable in the shared nature of the space. Despite this, a regular user of Norwich Cathedral library recently commented that it is perceived to be a rare example of a scholarly library in the city, and therein lies much of its appeal to those seeking study space.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that libraries do not make money. In cathedrals, the money-making potential is explored with regard to the library as with any part of the cathedral's life and work. Where to impose charges is a fraught question in the cathedral world: some cathedrals charge entrance fees; others refuse to do this, but do make overt requests for donation. The decision is a theological one as well as a practical one: the Church of England, as the established church, offers itself to any member of the public, regardless of their faith, and the cathedral, as the mother church of the diocese, offers itself particularly to all within that diocese as a place of prayer and a source of comfort. Various approaches reflect the desire to offer a free welcome: Norwich Cathedral maintains a commitment to offering access free of charge, whilst encouraging visitors to make a donation. Some cathedrals that charge for entry have a system to waive the charge for local inhabitants; others allow access without charge to a chapel for prayer, and to the cathedral for worship. Where a cathedral library has a study space, encouraging readers to use the cathedral's catering facilities is an obvious way of achieving some form of fundraising

from visitors in a "soft" way. Norwich Cathedral library offers free use of the study space and books for reference only, but has an annual subscription fee for borrowing rights. Durham and Hereford are both committed to the use of the library being completely free of charge.

Many cathedral libraries offer public tours for a fee. At some cathedrals, this is arranged by and within the library; at other cathedrals the library tour offer is part of the wider visitor engagement team's planning. One of the significant issues arising from this is the need to balance different uses of the library space: whilst a cathedral library may not offer silent study space, having a tour at the same time as the reading room is being used for study is rarely a happy combination. Segregating user groups by allowing certain use at specific times means that the needs of the user at the time can be focused upon, although it necessarily limits the available time for any one group of users. Norwich Cathedral attempts to manage this by having the library open to the general public on three days a week, leaving two days for booked groups, whether occasional tours or regular activities. Salisbury Cathedral library is open for use by appointment only.

Managing a theological library in a cathedral calls for lateral thinking and identifying how the collection can work in this context. One repeating theme among cathedral librarians is the sense that the librarian's role is very much part of the overall aim of the cathedral. This has distinct implications both for the public approach of the library and its staff, and also for the diffuse responsibilities that fall to the librarian. If the librarian is the only person a visitor will see, then the librarian represents the cathedral's ministry of hospitality and has a responsibility to act accordingly. The importance of the cathedral library as a gentle approach to the overtly religious space of the cathedral, and therefore the pastoral significance of the library and its staff, is perceived by many cathedral librarians. If the library can provide a way into the cathedral complex, then it has a role to play in welcoming that person, and perhaps giving them the support and guidance to enable them to take further steps along a spiritual journey, if that is right for them. St Davids Cathedral library encourages cathedral clergy to be a presence in the library, to further those pastoral encounters (Mari James, Zoom conversation, December 18, 2024).

The other aspect of the cathedral librarian's embeddedness within the wider cathedral is that the job is rarely solely that of librarian. Many librarians are not theology subject specialists; many also have responsibility for archives or object collections, or both. In some cathedrals, the person responsible for the library is not a trained librarian.

Some librarians find themselves engaging with areas beyond those of collections. For example, at Norwich, the librarian is actively engaged with Schools and Family Learning, assisting with delivery within these areas, as well as developing the cathedral's offering around its labyrinths, one a permanent structure in the cloister garth, the other a portable canvas labyrinth. This work is also a connection with the pilgrimage focus at Norwich Cathedral. Exhibitions, often of the cathedral's own collections, but also of external artists, is another area that may become part of the librarian's role. Some librarians have been called upon temporarily to cover a completely different area of work, due to the generally small staffs within a cathedral.

The lateral thinking required of a cathedral librarian is not only due to multiple responsibilities, but also because of the essential nature of the cathedral library that has been a fundamental issue in this chapter: that the library is not core to the cathedral and its purpose. This means that engagement with collections cannot be taken for granted, and experimenting with how to appeal to different audiences is an essential and ongoing aspect the role. These various endeavours sometimes relate closely to what might be considered traditional library territory, and at other times feel quite distant. Many examples have already been alluded to: leading public tours of the library; preparing exhibitions of library collections, including the accompanying display notes; enabling visits by special interest groups; facilitating research access to collections; assisting with school visits; running lecture series and other public engagement programmes; developing theological learning courses; social media posts.

A former librarian of Wells Cathedral published a book derived from his experience of showing people around the library, and the frequently asked questions arising (Spears 2016). Stephen Dart has prepared a series of introductions to aspects of the Ancient Library at St Edmundsbury Cathedral, which are accessible through the cathedral website (e.g. Dart, n.d.). Engagement with Heritage Open Days is a way to engage with an audience beyond the normal confines of the cathedral; Norwich specifically highlights the library with a library drop-in event on the annual theme, and more recently added a joint family learning and library event. Norwich Cathedral library offers a monthly session of Lectio Divina, the contemplative reading of the Bible that forms a key part of Benedictine spirituality. Norwich Cathedral library also offers a weekly "Listening Lunch". Inspired by the monastic practice of silent meals with someone reading aloud, "Listening Lunch" similarly offers reading aloud from books in the cathedral

library collections to people who are invited to bring a packed lunch. After the reading, there is time to discuss the reading informally or simply to enjoy conversation with other participants.

Engagement with bodies such as ABTAPL enable the cathedral librarian to reach beyond the cathedral world to gain insights from a variety of related but different contexts - such as academic institutions, small and large institutions - to illuminate the contextual issues of the unique world of cathedrals. For some cathedral libraries, the nature of the collection and its use within the institutional aims render ABTAPL irrelevant, but for others, ABTAPL can provide a vital source of help and support. For me, ABTAPL, with a large proportion of its membership being college librarians managing modern loan collections, can provide a balance to the time and interest I give to the historic collection, and a reminder that the modern theology collection also needs active management, and is not just passively there on the shelves awaiting the next borrower. On the specific issue of dealing with noise in the library, a plea to college librarian members to share how they manage similar issues was a useful source of advice, providing access to wider experience from related albeit not exactly similar, library situations. Other cathedral librarians have expressed appreciation of the inter-library lending capacity of ABTAPL, enabling librarians to read literature that would otherwise be difficult to access. The theological expertise in the ABTAPL membership is useful to cathedral librarians managing theological collections but without that subject background. The sheer activity of ABTAPL enables librarians, often working alone in an institution which has little real understanding of libraries, to connect with fellow professionals, helping to overcome the sense of isolation.

The range of backgrounds of ABTAPL members is also helpful to those working in cathedrals: the world of the Church of England can present as quite monolithic, which is often not how it feels on the ground in a cathedral library. Engaging across the membership of ABTAPL helped one cathedral librarian identify a commonality with college librarians working in the context of small collections with small resources, rather than with those from large institutions, which might seem the more likely relationship for a librarian from the large institutional background of a cathedral and the Church of England.

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Notes

1 On Maundy Thursday the British monarch gives two bags of specially minted coins (known as the Maundy money) (Wright 1990, 15) to a group of recipients aged at least 65, in recognition of their service to the community and as a symbol of the monarch's Christ-like service to the people of the realm (Wright 1990, 5). The service is held annually at a different venue, often a cathedral (Wright 1990, 2).

2 A report on "Post-pandemic clergy wellbeing" highlights workload among challenges to clergy well-being, particularly "managing multiple vocational and administrative pressures" (Living Ministry Research Briefings 2025) and reading, one suspects, is an early casualty of this situation.

3 Now operated by Jisc, but created as the union catalogue of Research Libraries UK (RLUK, n.d.).

4 In the Church of England, most newly-ordained ministers take up a curacy for around three years; in this post they receive practical training in ministry from their incumbent, as well as ongoing training managed by the Diocesan Director of Ordinands.

Common Awards

The Church and the Academy in Partnership; How a Collaboration Between the Church of England and Durham University is Supporting Theological Libraries

MICHAEL GALE

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck in March 2020, libraries of every description were forced to close their doors. Some were able to introduce a limited loans service based on collection or postal delivery, but many were forced to go online only as teachers and learners at every level of education discovered the joys of Zoom and virtual learning.

Theological libraries in the UK were no exception, but a small group of mainly Anglican training institutions (TEIs[1]) were fortuitously well-placed to benefit from the generosity of suppliers and publishers who were suddenly falling over themselves to make their content available online. Two years earlier, Common Awards, a partnership led by the Church of England and Durham University to deliver a suite of academic programmes in theology, ministry, and mission to students preparing for ministry, had done a deal with SCM Press to make selected SCM titles available as e-books to all students across the TEIs

via the Common Awards Hub.[2] Access to the Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials (Atla) and EBSCO's Religion & Philosophy Collection had already been secured. Thus, in March 2020, the infrastructure was in place for Common Awards to provide access to a range of content on a scale and at a speed which individual TEIs would have been hard-pressed to match on their own.

What is Common Awards?

Common Awards describes itself as a three-way partnership between TEIs, the Church of England and other participating churches,[3] and Durham University (Durham University 2024a). Common Awards is not an intuitive name, and for readers who are not familiar with the landscape of theological education in the UK (and even for those who are) it may need some unpacking. Unlike the Methodist Church of Great Britain, which sends its ordinands to a single training institution (my own institution, The Queen's Foundation in Birmingham), the Church of England has around twenty training institutions which offer a variety of training pathways, are all more or less independent,[4] and which differ from each other in a variety of ways. Ordinands, in consultation with their sponsoring diocese, get to choose where they go.

For our present purpose, two particular aspects of this diversity are worth noting. First, the different levels of library provision. Some TEIs have large libraries, a full-time, qualified librarian, and independent access to a range of online content. At the other end of the scale, some institutions have no physical site library at all (they may depend on other local libraries for access to printed books), and – prior to the arrival of the Common Awards Hub – would have had little or no online content of their own. It is therefore fair to say that from the outset, even before the start of the pandemic, the introduction of the Hub utterly transformed the learning environment for a large proportion of students at a single stroke.

Second, it used to be the case that each TEI negotiated the validation of its programmes by a university independently (as indeed many ABTAPL member institutions still do). From a library perspective, this led to some anomalies. Some validating universities offered access to electronic resources as part of the deal. Some didn't. Access to Atla was a key bone of contention. For TEIs this all changed when the Common Awards partnership was launched in 2014. Now almost all training programmes followed by Church of England ordinands are validated

by Durham University.[5] Although the university does not offer access to its own electronic resources to Common Awards students, nevertheless Common Awards itself, with its critical mass of over two thousand FTE students, is in a much stronger position to negotiate deals than individual TEIs and can also provide infrastructure on their behalf. The economies of scale are self-evident.

It is worth noting at this point that the imperative towards a collaborative arrangement and the benefits which have followed extend far beyond the provision of library resources. While Common Awards allows individual TEIs considerable flexibility in course design and recognizes the importance of having a wide range of diverse and distinctive training institutions, nevertheless by providing a common framework for its suite of programmes and accountability to a single university, it acts as a guarantor of academic standards. It also provides support and infrastructure across the board. This provision ranges from organising conferences and forums for the sharing of good practice to hosting individual TEIs' Moodle[6] sites and offering training and support in response to developments in online learning and artificial intelligence (AI). While there is some overlap between these aspects of Common Awards and library provision, the main focus of this chapter will be on the development of resources on the Common Awards Hub.

A point also needs to be made about the complex nature of the environment in which Common Awards operates. Not all TEI students are Anglican ordinands. Some of those who are not Anglican ordinands (they may be independent students or training for ordination in another denomination) study on Common Awards programmes while others are on non-accredited programmes or on programmes validated by another university. The latter have access to some resources on the Hub, such as EBSCO's Religion and Philosophy Collection, but not others, such as Atla.

Finally, there is a broader vision at the heart of Common Awards, which extends beyond the resourcing of TEIs. Several Church of England dioceses are also now signed up in order to support their lay and post-ordination training. The Scottish Episcopal Institute, which serves the Scottish Episcopal Church, and St Padarn's Institute, which trains ministers for the Church in Wales, are both members. And there are plans afoot to extend access to some Hub resources to all Church of England clergy and licensed readers. All this is indicative of the changing landscape of theological education and lifelong learning which no doubt will continue to evolve. But it is also an essential part

of the context of the story which follows. It does sometimes get rather complicated.

The Lambeth Palace Conference

In February 2016, a conference of Common Awards librarians was held at Lambeth Palace. The conference was convened by Dr. Ken Farrimond, Virtual Learning Environment and Blended Learning Officer for the Ministry Division[7] of the Church of England, and was attended by representatives of fifteen TEIs, most – but not all – of whom were librarians.

The purpose of the conference was to explore ways in which the benefits of Common Awards could be extended to library provision. In the two years since the launch of Common Awards, there had been a brief but unsuccessful experiment with a platform called CAVLE[8] to provide access to online resources. These included JSTOR[9] (funded by Durham University) and – for a trial period only – EBSCO's Religion & Philosophy Collection. But CAVLE was beset by technical difficulties and was not taken up by all TEIs. Now, Ken was keen to sound us out about what we would like to see on a new Common Awards "hub" which would be accessed within Moodle. Access to online journals was deemed to be the top priority and a key question was whether that access would be limited to Common Awards students or could be extended to all.

Common Awards had already introduced some other library-related benefits. These included Durham campus cards for all Common Awards students (which confer borrowing rights at Durham University library) and access to Durham's electronic resources for all TEI tutors. The latter is a considerable boon for a group of academics who might otherwise have no access to a university's e-resources. Campus cards, on the other hand, are of little practical use unless you happen to live nearby, though they do confer a sense of brand identity, which is valued by some students.

But perhaps the most significant potential benefit was SCONUL access,[10] a voluntary reciprocal arrangement between university libraries to grant students of one university entitlements at the library of another (SCONUL 2024). But the scheme is not straightforward. Not all libraries are members, and not all "host" libraries grant full entitlements to all students. Membership was initially granted to part-time Common Awards students, providing their "local" university was also

willing to "host" them, but even that partial privilege has now been withdrawn.

Another item on the conference agenda was e-books. Back in 2016, very few TEIs had significant collections of e-books, and some had none at all.[11] One of the problems was that core theological textbooks were simply not available on most platforms or were available only at an unaffordable price.

We were therefore pleased to have in attendance at Lambeth Palace Michael Addison, the Sales and Marketing Director of Hymns Ancient & Modern, and David Shervington, the newly appointed Senior Commissioning Editor for SCM Press, part of the Hymns Ancient & Modern group. SCM Press is a key publisher for TEIs, in particular for its *SCM Studyguides* and *SCM Core Texts* series. Michael and David were enthusiastic about resourcing theological education and were keen to explore how they could tap into the Common Awards market. We were keen to get access to their e-books at a price we could afford, and I had a strong sense that we were both pulling in the same direction. An idea was born.

The Common Awards – SCM Press E-books Initiative

By September 2016 the Common Awards Hub was up and running, providing limited access to JSTOR (as noted above) and full access to EBSCO's Religion & Philosophy Collection for all TEI students. At Queen's we were able to cancel our own Religion & Philosophy Collection subscription, thus saving £1,500 per annum. When Atla was later added, access was restricted to Common Awards students only. At Queen's we have significant numbers of students who are not on a Common Awards programme, so we have continued to subscribe to Atla independently, but for many TEIs the provision of online journals at no direct cost was a game changer.

In June 2017 I was invited by Ken to a meeting in London with Michael Addison. Our challenge was to find a way of meeting the need of students for online access to core texts without a detrimental impact on SCM's book sales, which are largely dependent on the student market. We discussed three options. One was for SCM to offer an e-book "taster" of each title, free of charge, on the Hub. This would have been something more than the 10% permitted by the UK Copyright Licencing Agency's Higher Education licence (Copyright Licencing Agency 2023), but well short of the whole book. The idea

was that this might boost print book sales, but it fell short of what librarians were asking for.

The second option was making content available on a third party's platform, such as EBSCO's Religion E-book Collection, to which Common Awards might then negotiate access. But this would have involved a complex range of behind-the-scenes deals, some of which would have been out of our hands. The prospect of a quick resolution was unlikely.

The third option was for SCM e-books to be made available on the Hub. Michael was interested in the idea of developing an "SCM classics" e-book collection, and from this emerged a proposal to identify 100 titles from the back catalogues of SCM Press and Canterbury Press (another Hymns Ancient & Modern imprint), to be selected ultimately by the publisher but after consultation with Common Awards librarians, with hosting costs met by Common Awards, and at a rate to be negotiated based on student numbers.

The SCM e-books were launched in May 2018. Interestingly, SCM Press initially withheld two of their bestselling titles in order to protect their print sales (the titles were added to the collection at a later date). Some of the titles selected were drawn from the "indicative reading" lists of Common Awards modules, and others were chosen on the recommendation of Common Awards librarians and based on loans data. But the list also included some slower selling titles to which SCM Press wanted to give wider exposure. It was an opportunity to showcase their stock, and links were provided to enable students to purchase print copies at a discount. All that remained was to see if the numbers would add up.

The initiative has clearly been a success. In the first year of operation alone 67% of eligible students accessed the collection, and each book was accessed by an average of 87 students. Unsurprisingly, the collection was especially well-used by students without easy access to a physical library.

From a library perspective it has reduced the need to invest in multiple print copies. But clearly SCM's print sales have not suffered disproportionately, if at all. They have continued to invest in the collection, adding twenty titles a year in consultation with librarians, the only caveat being that they insist on a one-year embargo on new titles.

Later we will reflect on some of the wider impacts of the Hub and in particular its impact on student reading lists. But for now we simply need to note the significance of the SCM e-books initiative in the development of the Common Awards Hub, and the part it played as a model for future deals.

Hub Plus

From the beginning, the vision for the Hub extended beyond the provision of access to online journals and e-books. It was seen as a place where TEIs could share best practice and their own in-house resources, and as a gateway for curated free online resources along the lines of Intute, the service funded by JISC [12] which was discontinued in 2011 (JISC 2010). This place has become Hub Plus.

The idea of sharing resources is an interesting one. Amongst theological educators (and indeed amongst librarians) there is a strong instinct to collaborate, and yet the institutional model of theological education supported by the Church of England is inherently adversarial. TEIs are essentially rivals, competing for students, sometimes to the point of their own survival.[13] They tend also to be fiercely independent and protective of their distinctive identity. There has been little evidence of resource sharing between TEIs.

The idea of a curated gateway is also interesting and has much to recommend it. One of the tools employed was to carry out (with permission) a data mining exercise of TEI websites to gather links to external resources, which were then reviewed by specialists and selectively added. There are now more than 1,500 resources on Hub Plus. But one of the challenges of a curated gateway is the cost of maintaining it. Links break and resources become outdated. This was essentially what led to the demise of Intute. One might also ask whether students are attracted by a curated gateway when many seem to be more inclined to do their own searching. From a librarian's perspective, the need for students to develop their search skills is arguably greater than ever, but the solution may lie in training rather than curation.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

In March 2020 the pandemic struck. Ken Farrimond quickly convened an online teaching workshop for TEI tutors, covering adult learning and pedagogy as well as the more technical aspects of delivery via Moodle. At this early stage, Big Blue Button emerged as the virtual classroom software of choice, but it was soon overtaken by Zoom, which quickly became ubiquitous.

Ken also convened an online meeting of Common Awards librarians to brief us on the latest developments. Access to EBSCO's Religion E-book Collection had been secured, but initially this was only available to

Common Awards students. Later it was extended to all students, and in 2021 we were able to cancel our own subscription.

A deal with the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) was also imminent. This was similar to the deal with SCM Press, but initially only forty titles were made available, and a discount was included to take into account those students who had already signed up for an earlier and unrelated SPCK offering to individual Anglican ordinands.[14]

Of those publishers who were responding to the global crisis, T&T Clark were quickest off the mark, providing free access to their Theology & Religion Online collection. Cambridge University Press (CUP) were slower to get up and running, but the deal when it came was more extensive, with full access to all the *Cambridge Companions* as well as the *Cambridge History of Christianity* series. Moreover, the relationship with CUP has endured. T&T Clark withdrew their offering once the immediate crisis had passed, but usage data from the free trial period was used to negotiate a deal for ongoing access to the most relevant CUP content.

The point to note about this period of upheaval was that Common Awards with its critical mass of students and its existing infrastructure was much better placed to negotiate these deals than individual TEIs would have been. We were all beneficiaries. But the biggest test was still to come.

The Demise of Dawsonera

Dawson Books was a major supplier to libraries in the UK higher education sector, and many Common Awards librarians would have been familiar with them. In the early 2010s its e-book platform, Dawsonera, was an excellent way for smaller institutions to explore the brave new world of e-books at a time when, with increasing numbers of students studying mainly or exclusively at a distance, there was a strong imperative to make resources available online. Institutions could purchase as many – or as few – e-book titles as they wished. In 2011/12 we bought our first five titles at a cost of £164.79.

Dawsonera brought many obvious benefits, including multiple access to most titles, but there were also drawbacks, including the requirement for students to remember yet another login, and – as has already been noted – the cost of some titles and the lack of availability of others. Nevertheless, our e-book collection was growing and by

2020 we had more than forty titles. Amongst TEIs, St John's College, Nottingham was a pioneer of e-books and at the time of their closure in 2019, they owned 183 Dawsonera titles. What would happen to them?

Common Awards seized the moment. Amidst the chaos caused by the Covid pandemic they made a deal with Dawson Books to make all the St John's e-books available to all TEI students via the Hub. Furthermore, Dawson's agreed that other TEIs could contribute their Dawsonera e-books to the Hub, too. This raised an interesting question of fairness. Some TEIs would be contributing more than others. And there was a question of ownership. Were TEIs effectively relinquishing ownership of their collections? But these were minor details in what was clearly a win–win for everyone.

And then in June 2020, Dawson Books went into administration.

I imagine that many librarians around the country had to move fast at this point (if indeed they were actually ordering books at all at the height of the lockdown). We already had a (largely dormant) arrangement with Askews (part of the Little Group), so we were able to move our print book orders over to them fairly seamlessly. But the issue of access to our e-books at such a key moment suddenly became critical. I was grateful that Common Awards also moved fast. A deal was done with Browns Books (also part of the Little Group) to host the Dawsonera titles on their VLEbooks platform.

The Hub Today

Since the start of the pandemic and the tumultuous year which followed, the Hub has evolved. There are now more than 12,000 Hub e-books, of which EBSCO's Religion E-book Collection constitutes nearly 10,000. More than half of the remainder have been purchased on the VLEbooks platform (1,291 titles), and a smaller number of titles (451) have been purchased independently on the EBSCO platform, either because they were not available on VLEbooks at the time or because EBSCO offered a better deal. SCM (229), SPCK (84) and CUP (250) make up the rest of the collection.[15]

The Hub collection is thus inevitably something of a patchwork, a mixture of platforms, suppliers and interfaces. Even within individual platforms there may be different licensing models (ranging from single-user licences and 'credits'[16] to unlimited multiple access) as well as different rules about copying and printing and reading on different devices. This can be very confusing for students and is one

of the drawbacks of the Hub model. The single search portal is also very basic. It only allows for searching of the author, title and publisher fields, and the quality of the bibliographic data underpinning the collection is sometimes poor.

Another minor drawback is that TEIs are tied into the ordering schedules of Common Awards. In the past when we purchased our own Dawsonera e-books, we could order today and our students would have access tomorrow. Now we tend to have to wait a little longer. But there is flexibility in the system. Common Awards is a small team and are receptive to requests for urgency.

But the weaknesses are outweighed by the many benefits. By purchasing on the VLEbooks platform and – to a lesser extent – on the EBSCO platform, Common Awards has been able to purchase specifically to support the needs of TEIs. Librarians can pass on recommendations from tutors. The TEI from which the recommendation has come typically contributes 50% of the cost. The outcome is that TEI purchases are effectively subsidized and other TEIs reap the benefit free of charge.

There is some flexibility in the system here, too. Common Awards will usually purchase a more expensive licence (when available) than the one which an individual TEI might choose for itself in order to allow for the additional usage, which is likely to accrue. If a title is likely to be of use only to one TEI, then a cheaper licence may be purchased and access restricted to the single institution.

There has sometimes been a debate around the value of EBSCO's Religion Ebook Collection, which tends towards higher level academic texts rather than textbooks.[17] As a subscription database, it is also vulnerable to withdrawals, which can be frustrating for tutors who have chosen to gear their reading lists towards it. But it has two distinct benefits. One is the scale and quality of the collection. Ten thousand high quality academic titles represents a considerable online library, something which more closely replicates a well-stocked print library in its capacity to facilitate browsing and serendipity, which librarians will understand are key to resource discovery.

The second benefit is EBSCO's search functionality, which is far more sophisticated than that offered by Common Awards' single search portal. To find it, students have to come out of e-books and go into online journals (which is somewhat counterintuitive), which is where the links to the EBSCO databases are to be found. The EBSCO Religion E-book Collection can then be searched independently, making use of all the usual EBSCO functionality, including full text searching.

The Librarian Experience

One of the unintended consequences of the Common Awards Hub has been its potential to disempower TEI librarians. In the past, TEIs would have made independent decisions about library purchases, and are still free to do so, but the Hub has introduced a shift towards centralisation. Collection management is one of the key skills of the librarian, and while TEI librarians may still have an advisory role and can make recommendations, nevertheless much of the purchasing power has been delegated away from TEIs and towards Common Awards. The financial savings have been one of the benefits of this process of centralisation, but the sense of being deskilled, which some TEI librarians may experience, has been one of the costs.

This is most clearly exemplified in the selection of databases. In the past, if a database such as EBSCO's Religion E-book Collection was under consideration by a TEI, the librarian would consult with tutors, evaluate the database (for example, by matching it against student reading lists), set up a trial, monitor the usage, and review the results, perhaps in consultation with a Library Committee or some other advisory panel. Now it is much more likely that the database would be recommended to Common Awards. This is partly because Common Awards are likely to be able to negotiate a more cost-effective deal but also because locating the resource on the Hub brings the benefit of having all online resources in one place. It is, of course, open to TEIs to subscribe to databases, or any other resource, independently, and at Queen's we have maintained a number of our own online journal subscriptions. But independent subscriptions are less visible to students. The Hub has become the place to go.

The Student Experience

During the worst period of the Covid lockdown it was inevitable that access to print books was restricted. At Queen's we were able to offer a postal service to our students as well as a collection service to those who lived on site. But nevertheless our loans figures plummeted. The transition to online resources, which had already begun in response to the growing numbers of students who are rarely on site, went into overdrive, and our tutors were encouraged to make greater use of online journals and e-books on their reading lists. It is a trend which has continued.

It is worth pausing for a moment to examine the impact of the shift towards e-resources on the student experience. What do students make of the Common Awards Hub? Since its inception, Common Awards has conducted an annual student survey, and in its most recent iteration (2023/24) 93% of respondents agreed that the provision of learning resources in general (both print and online) was sufficient to support their studies (Durham University 2024b). It is hard to know exactly what this figure means, given that some students have considerably better access to resources than others, and because the relatively short duration of courses (typically two years) means that most students are not in a position to compare current provision with what went before. But nevertheless, 93% is a high figure however it is interpreted. It suggests that the Common Awards Hub is doing something right.

A slightly different picture emerged from our own annual library survey at the height of the Covid restrictions. At Queen's we have invested in both print and online resources over many years, so our students enjoy the best of both worlds, and regularly affirm the value of the library service they receive. But in the survey of March 2021, when the library had been closed for a year, there was a marked sense that some students were struggling with the dependence on e-resources (Queen's Foundation Library 2021). A variety of reasons were cited, including screen fatigue, sore eyes, and the mental challenge of sustaining 'deep' reading online, a finding which resonates with the claims of commentators such as Nicholas Carr that computer use is undermining our ability to read deeply and therefore also to think deeply (Carr 2010, 122–23).

Moreover the opportunity to browse a library on site was also clearly being missed. One respondent described it as the "biggest sadness" and another commented that "online resources do not adequately replicate the experience and learning that can be achieved from visiting the physical library."

The Common Awards Hub has considerably enhanced the service which librarians can offer by facilitating access to a wide range of resources to large numbers of students, many of whom are rarely or never on site. But nevertheless, it is reasonable to ask whether there might be losses as well as gains from a pedagogy which leans towards e-reading.

Diversifying the Common Awards Curriculum

Another interesting pedagogical question concerns the shaping of student reading lists. There is a sense in which recommended reading

has always been dependent on availability, whether in print or online. After all, there is little point in recommending a text to which students do not have access. But when reading lists are geared towards online collections, there may be a tendency for influence over student reading to shift away from institutions and towards the suppliers of the collections, whose motivations may be primarily financial.

The Common Awards Hub is rather different. On one hand, TEIs have some influence over what is purchased and can usually request titles that they want. On the other hand, there is the opportunity for Common Awards, drawing on all the theological and educational expertise at its disposal, to shape the Hub (and therefore student reading) in a direction which is determined by other – more pedagogical – considerations. This is what is happening with the Diversifying the Common Awards Curriculum project (Durham University 2024c).

The three-year project was set up in response to the report *From Lament to Action* on racism in the Church of England (Church of England 2021) and aims to support TEIs in creating a more diverse and inclusive experience for Common Awards students. Part of its remit is to make available a wider range of theological voices from the Global South and in the first year of the project over forty new e-books were added to the Hub collection. Annotated bibliographies have been compiled in different subject areas, and videos on good teaching practice have been created. There are plans to deliver workshops for staff and classes for students on engaging with different perspectives.

From a library perspective, the project is a good example of mutual support. Some of the titles recommended by TEIs to Common Awards fall within the remit of the project and are passed on to the project team for consideration. If selected, they are fully funded by the project. Other titles selected by the project team may act as a useful guide to TEIs (those with physical libraries) for their own stock selection.

The Future of the Common Awards Hub

The Hub is a work in progress. It is a regular agenda item at meetings of the Networked Learning Advisory Group, which advises the Ministry Development Team on all aspects of networked learning and of which I am a member as the TEI librarian representative. It is now approaching the next phase in its development, which is to introduce EBSCO's Discovery Service as its search interface. This will present students with a single search portal for the online journals, the e-books and

Hub Plus. Phase two of the project will involve inviting TEIs (for a fee) to include their own resources, so that students at a given TEI will be able to do a single search of all the resources which are available to them (but excluding those which are only available to students of other TEIs). It remains to be seen whether this will represent a 'lowest common denominator' approach to searching or will raise the standard to EBSCO's higher bar. But at the very least it will make life easier for students and will address some of the drawbacks discussed earlier.

Another challenge may come in the form of Perlego's digital library of e-books (Perlego 2024). Perlego's subscription service is not a conventional library service. The company has been operating since 2016 and now has a collection of over one million e-books which are primarily aimed at the student textbook market. Originally targeted at individual students, it is now competing for the library market by offering bulk subscriptions at a reduced cost. But students are still essentially individual subscribers. It is simply that the institution pays the cost.

This is one reason why Perlego would not be compatible with the Hub model. The other reason is financial. The cost of paying for individual subscriptions for every student, even at a reduced rate, would be huge. Perlego is most cost effective at the individual level. It is cheaper (by far) for students to subscribe to Perlego than it is for them to buy their own books. But in comparison with other library subscriptions, it is very expensive, and institutions need to think carefully about its cost effectiveness before going down the Perlego route.

But Perlego is popular amongst its many users, and for some students it may appear to be an appealing alternative to the Common Awards Hub. It has invested heavily in its functionality, including its accessibility features, and its collection is huge and multidisciplinary. But there are gaps in its coverage (neither Oxford nor Cambridge university presses are currently represented). It may complement the other resources to which TEI students have access, but it does not replace them.

From Perlego we can learn something of the challenges which are facing both the Common Awards Hub and libraries more generally. We live in a world in which students demand instant gratification and are easily dazzled by the appearance of modern technology. By comparison the Hub has been assembled on a shoestring and its achievement is all the more commendable for that. But it cannot afford to look and feel cheap.

The Wider Vision

There has always been a wider vision for the Common Awards Hub. As early as the Lambeth Palace conference in 2016, the hope was expressed that access to the resources of the Hub could be extended beyond the TEIs to the wider church. That vision has been partially realised by the inclusion of several dioceses to support their lay and post-ordination training. The next phase includes making the Hub available to all clergy and licensed readers in the Church of England and is indicative of the holistic vision at the heart of Common Awards which is to resource the lifelong learning of the church.

It is regrettable but inevitable that this only extends to the Church of England, and highlights both a weakness and also the considerable achievement of Common Awards. The weakness is that the project can often appear to be narrowly Anglican. Its achievement is that despite this, it is managing to resource so many students from other denominations.

Common Awards and ABTAPL

In November 2023, Ken Farrimond convened another meeting of Common Awards librarians to coincide with the ABTAPL Autumn Meeting in London. It is perhaps indicative of the relationship between Common Awards and ABTAPL that only seven delegates were able to attend. The lack of synergy between the two groups has been a curious truism throughout the period since the Hub was introduced and may be partly explained by the fact that many TEIs do not have a librarian, or at least not one with the time to attend meetings in London.

Ken has also set up a space on the Hub for Common Awards librarians to engage with each other, and yet we rarely do so. Why is this? One reason may be that we look to ABTAPL as our network and are disinclined to engage with multiple networks, or that we don't have time, or that as solo librarians we are happy just to get on with our own jobs, or that like ABTAPL libraries in general, we are characterised by our diversity and have less in common than one might expect.

But I suspect that another reason may simply be the success of the Hub project. We take so much of it for granted now, but where would we be without it? This chapter has sought to highlight the considerable

benefits which the Hub brings. These include the provision of a wider range of electronic resources than would otherwise be available to most TEIs and at a lower cost, the convenience of having everything in one place and accessed through TEIs' Moodle sites, and the flexibility to accommodate and respect the diversity of TEIs while also drawing on shared expertise in the area of collection development. It is driven by a vision of service to the wider church and it continues to evolve.

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Notes

1   The abbreviation stands for Theological Education Institution and is the term preferred by the Church of England for its training institutions.

2   The shared platform on which resources are hosted or accessed.

3   Of the other "participating churches," only the Methodist Church is represented on the Common Awards Management Board.

4   Some TEIs have a particularly close relationship with individual Church of England dioceses and may thus be said to be not entirely independent.

5   At the time of writing, one TEI has chosen to remain in partnership with another university and is not part of Common Awards.

6   The Virtual Learning Environment used by most TEIs.

7   Now renamed the Ministry Development Team.

8   CAVLE = Common Awards Virtual Learning Environment.

9   Just the Religion journals, which is a relatively small subset of the whole JSTOR collection. This was – and remains – only available to Common Awards students.

10   SCONUL = Society of College, National and University Libraries.

11   In my discussion group, five out of nine delegates said they had no e-books.

12   JISC = Joint Information Systems Committee. It was formerly a subcommittee of the Higher Education Funding Councils, but in 2012 it became a registered charity and was renamed Jisc.

13   One TEI, St. John's College, Nottingham, closed in 2019 for financial reasons.

14   With the support of the Clergy Support Trust, a library of over 1000 e-book titles had been made available to all Anglican ordinands and curates in training.

15   These figures were correct as of November 2024.

16   The 'credit' model permits a certain number of accesses per year, typically 300–400.

17   In 2015 we matched a sample of student reading lists against the EBSCO collection and found only 3.4% of the titles. This compared with 13.6% on the Dawsonera platform at the time.

Classification in Theological Libraries Today

Ethics and Practice, Local and Global

JANE SINNETT-SMITH

*I*n a 2020 address to the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association, Alissa McCulloch observed that many historical cataloguing and classification biases "traditionally really suited [Christian] theological libraries" (McCulloch 2020). Engaging closely with such historical biases, this chapter explores the particular practical and ethical challenges of classification in theological libraries whose holdings and classification practices have historically focused on Christianity. It considers how theological libraries might balance responsibilities to existing collections and sensitive treatment of religions or denominations outside their traditional focus.

This chapter's discussion is set against a backdrop of two important movements in (theological) librarianship. Section one considers classification in the context of the efforts of many theological libraries in the UK to decolonise collections, fostering cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity through collection development. It underlines the

importance of classification within these efforts; that is, how we organise, represent, and provide access to these increasingly diverse collections past the point of acquisition. Across the library sector more broadly, there is well-established and increasing scrutiny of universal classification schemes' historical biases, including critiques of Christian-centric biases (Olson 2002, 7). Section two digs into debates on reforming Library of Congress Classification (LCC) and Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), exploring why working towards equitable, ethical classification schemes matters and arguing for the importance of actively attending to this problem on the ground, from accurately representing collections to practical retrieval issues. It argues that (Christian) theological libraries have particular obligations to engage in these debates, not only as spaces serving both academic and faith communities, but as beneficiaries of historically-biased classification practices now grappling with adapting to readers' and holdings' changing needs. Engaging with these debates does not diminish Christian-centred libraries, but productively foregrounds awareness of institutions' individual contexts and histories, and can work to improve our services to our user communities. Turning more closely to theological libraries within the UK today, section three provides an overview of the classification schemes in use in ABTAPL members' libraries, and reflects on how local adaptions can, by their nature as small-scale and customised, provide helpful if imperfect solutions to the biases and insufficiencies of global, general schemes.

A significant focus of this chapter's discussion is the recognition that libraries are not neutral spaces that objectively organise and communicate knowledge, but complex institutions whose organisation and systems are informed by their specific cultural and historic context. As Hope Olson points out, claims to library neutrality can obscure the biases and exclusions many library systems continue to perpetuate, positioning one specific, contextual viewpoint as instead a universal default (Olson 2001, 640). As such, it is helpful to begin by setting out this chapter's perspective. This chapter specifically focuses on the impact of classification debate and reform on UK Christian theological libraries. This focus is informed in part by the overwhelming preponderance of current or historically Christian-focused ABTAPL members. Based on data collected in 2024 from the ABTAPL Directory of Institutional Members, of the 70 libraries listed (counting separately distinct collections housed within a single institution, such as the Angus Library and Archive at Regent's Park College, Oxford), all but three (the Aga Khan Library, the Leo Baeck

College Library, the Woolf Institute Library) have a current focus on Christianity, or have historically grown out of Christian roots (ABTAPL, n.d.). An example of the latter is New College, University of Edinburgh, which was founded for the Free Church College, and now "serves the University's School of Divinity," covering religious studies more broadly (New College Library 2024).

Christian or historically Christian libraries are a broad category encompassing a range of institutional needs, as ABTAPL members demonstrate, from departmental or college libraries within larger university institutions (such as New College or Mansfield College Library, University of Oxford) to cathedral libraries (such as Hereford or Norwich). ABTAPL membership is dominated by theological training colleges; over 50% of the 70 libraries included in the Directory serve a college or seminary training students for some form of Christian ministry (ABTAPL, n.d.). ABTAPL member libraries serve diverse communities, from single denominations to ecumenical, interdenominational, multi-faith, and secular institutions (such as those within larger university bodies; Berryhill 2020, 8).

These diverse institutions have varying classification needs. A collection of rare books housed in a historic library may choose, for example, to consciously preserve a local historic classification scheme as part of their library's heritage. The special collections of Westminster College, Cambridge, provide an example. When these items were moved into an archive strongroom, they retained their historical, location-based class marks, even while this locational information no longer accurately reflects their placement within the library. User discoverability and subject colocation may be a low priority for closed-stack libraries when library staff mediate between readers and the shelves (Harvey and Greenwood 2020, 8–9). In contrast, in college or university open-shelf libraries, where readers regularly browse collections and new holdings are frequently acquired, the demands on classification look very different; the key here is the ability of readers to quickly and easily find and retrieve items, as well as the accurate representation and browsability of subject matter (Bair 2005, 14). While this chapter primarily targets the classification needs of "working," user-facing libraries, especially in educational institutes, it emphasises throughout that there is no one-size-fits-all classification scheme or policy appropriate to every theological library.

Decolonisation and Classification in UK Theological Libraries

Discussion of historical biases within classification and other library systems is situated within broader movements to decolonise universities in the UK higher education sector. Decolonisation signals here "the idea that the legacy of empire continues to shape how knowledge is produced, circulated and reproduced" (Durham University, n.d.). The goals of decolonisation within universities involve identifying ways in which curricula are shaped by colonial legacies, making unseen biases and assumptions visible, and working to move forwards by, for example, addressing underrepresented voices and scholarship (Smith and Appleton 2023, 820).

Like UK universities more broadly, theological educational institutes – and the library collections serving them – are rooted in legacies of colonialism and white supremacy (Samokishyn 2022, 36; Meyers 2021, 11, 22). Theological and historical studies emphasise the ongoing impact and complexities of reckoning with European mission Christianity's complicity in colonialism (Ahn 2022, 334; Reddie 2021, 153–56; Wariboko 2018, 59–60; Jennings 2010, 8). Within theological education, Durham University, which validates the Common Awards ordination training of many ABTAPL members, sets out what decolonising curricula means for theological teaching institutes in particular, stressing the importance of critically engaging with "problematic assumptions" in theological teaching, wider engagement with theologians globally, and with the concrete impact of racism and inequalities today (Durham University, n.d.). Lack of representation and marginalisation of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) voices in curricula can be a significant barrier to "belonging in theological education" for BAME students in the UK and across the world: engaging with decolonisation activities aims to create more inclusive spaces for a "diverse student body" (Durham University, n.d.). Theological education is today more global than ever; Christian theological institutes and their libraries inhabit a rapidly changing landscape, as UK student numbers dwindle and Christianity's centre shifts from the Global North to the Global South, transforming student demographics and attendant library needs (Coleman 2022, 59; Berryhill 2020, 10; Gale and Reekie 2008, 7). Many theological training colleges now offer global distance learning, emphasising the shifting needs for libraries to serve this increasingly diverse, global community (see for example, The Queen's Foundation 2025; Spurgeon's College

2022; Cambridge Theological Federation, n.d.). Decolonisation efforts allow theological institutes and their libraries to better represent and serve their user communities.

As Marilyn Clarke points out, libraries, as organisers of knowledge resources, are as complicit in perpetuating the "silencing [of] marginalised voices" as the institutions they belong to (Clarke 2021, 239). A key focus for tackling historical biases and underrepresentation is fostering cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity through collection development (Smith and Appleton 2023, 820; Coleman 2022, 58–59). For example, European and North American scholarship dominates theological holdings; libraries may seek to diversify these collections by adding publications from underrepresented diverse geographic, cultural, and religious voices, in particular "de-northernising" holdings by seeking out Global South and indigenous publishers (Samokishyn 2022, 36, 38; Clarke 2021, 244, 250; Meyers 2021, 11, 22; Morales et al. 2014, 448). While these strategies target assessing collection gaps and selecting diverse new acquisitions, building inclusive collections extends past acquisition throughout resources' lifespans.

Addressing biases in classification and cataloguing is an important thread in efforts to build more equitable libraries. Library classification schemes and subject headings have their roots in "colonial-era knowledges" that prioritise (for example) Western perspectives, while marginalising those of the majority world (Smith and Appleton 2023, 819–21). Engaging with these biases can work to deconstruct and avoid replicating harmful knowledge organisation practices within collections (Montague-Hellen 2024, 72; Clarke 2021, 241). Appleton and Smith's 2023 survey of UK university libraries' tackling of classification biases sorts such work into two broad approaches (822–23). A practical approach aims to identify and reclassify problem areas in the library (an example in theological libraries might be examination of class marks for global indigenous churches – are they given placements and class marks of their own, or are they treated as corollaries to European missionary churches?). A critical approach "seeks not to eliminate bias," but to educate users about the existence and navigation of historical biases. An example might be clear, upfront acknowledgement to patrons that a library and its catalogue contains discriminatory language that is retained for historical purposes, such as that deployed on the Lambeth Palace online catalogue (Lambeth Palace Library, n.d.). Such an approach draws attention to historical biases, placing them into their appropriate cultural and historical contexts, rather than positioning them as a default, unspoken norm.

As this chapter turns towards closer exploration of the classification of religion, discussion weaves between these two approaches, both critically engaging with classification biases and considering practical solutions. Scholarship on university libraries often cites Christian-centric classification schemes as an aspect of library biases in need of rectification (Clarke 2021, 252). What does this Christian focus look like in practice, and what does discussion regarding its reform mean for specialist theological libraries?

Biases and Reforms in the Classification of Religion

In this section, I consider the two principal classification schemes in use in UK libraries – Library of Congress Classification (LCC) and Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) – in light of scholarly and practitioner literature concerning the reform of historical religious biases (Broughton 2017, 483). I use LCC as a prism through which to examine what we mean by religious classification biases, how they impact holdings on a granular level, and why such biases matter for theological libraries. I then turn briefly to efforts to reform DDC's classification of religion, exploring what proposed large-scale reform of global classification schemes might look like in practice.

LCC is a popular choice in Christian theological libraries worldwide for its accessibility (free online schedules, usage across shared cata-logue records); centrally-managed responsiveness to new scholarship (efficient for small library teams); and extensive, granular classification for Christian theological subjects (Harvey and Greenwood 2020, 6–7). This final point forms the crux of this section's discussion: while LCC works effectively for historically Christian collections, there are stark imbalances in LCC's classification of many other religions. Since at least the 1970s, there has been an extensive body of research into the biases and omissions of LCC (Berman 1993). LCC is a general classification scheme that theoretically represents all subjects (Laddusaw 2019, 197; Olson 2002, 7). Yet as Melissa Adler and Hope Olson both highlight, the "universality" LCC constructs is highly culturally specific, reflecting the ideologies and biases of its societal context, presuming a singular, exclusive reading community (Adler 2017, xvi; Olson 2002, 12; 2001, 642–43). This community is "American/Western European, Christian, white, heterosexual, and male" (S. A. Knowlton 2005, 124–25). Readers and subjects excluded from these categories are in turn excluded or marginalised in LCC and allied systems. LCC (alongside associated

systems like the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), and other universal classification schemes like DDC) has come under scrutiny for exhibiting biases of "gender, sexuality, race, age, ability, ethnicity, language and religion" (Olson 2002, 7). The effects of LCC (and DDC) biases are at once practical and ethical; they limit diverse and marginalised subjects' effective representation within libraries and impede retrieval for users looking for this information (Furner 2007, 154; Olson 2001, 639). Classification biases not only reflect wider prejudices in the mainstream society that created them, but replicate and reinforce these prejudices within and beyond libraries (Baker and Islam 2020, 30; Adler 2017, 2; Furner 2007, 165).

Despite extensive critiques levelled at LCC's representational biases, there has been comparatively little attention paid to religious questions (Baker and Islam 2020, 28). While Sanford Berman's seminal call to arms underscored LCC and LCSH's pervasive "Christocentrism," religion is perhaps the subject slowest to be changed, suggesting enduring Christian bias continues to inflect LCC (S. A. Knowlton 2005, 128; Berman 1993, 5). Drew Baker and Nazia Islam identify three problems with LCC's treatment of religion: "unequal real estate, ethnocentric category boundaries, and assumed universal categories" (Baker and Islam 2020, 30). A comparison of the treatment of Christianity and Islam in LCC is illustrative here. The LCC B-class Religion schedules amply exemplify LCC's "unequal real estate." Christianity occupies five subclasses: BR Christianity, BS Bible, BT Doctrinal theology, BV Practical theology, BX Christian Denominations (Library of Congress 2024b, 1–472), Islam, in contrast, shares, one subclass (BP) with Bahai, Theosophy, and "Other beliefs and movements" (Library of Congress 2024a, 162–94). Indeed, commenting on global classification schemes' Western-centrism and inadequate space offered to Islam, Haroon Idrees concludes that neither LCC nor DDC can adequately classify libraries that focus on Islamic literature (Idrees 2012, 174–75; 2011, 124, 130, 141). This inattention to a major world religion is not justified by the terms that the Library of Congress itself sets out for the inclusion of subjects within its classification – "literary warrant," that is, based on the literature that has been published on a given topic. A vast body of Islamic literature with extensive historical roots predates widespread Christian literacy (Idrees 2011, 125–26).

One proffered solution to world religions' lack of "real estate" at subclass level is using LCC's post-decimal numbers and Cutters to extend their detailed classification (Baker and Islam 2020, 30). However practical this may be, conceptually relegating expansion only

to post-decimals and Cutters continues imbalanced representation of diverse knowledge through unequal enforcement of organisational hierarchy. Again, a comparison of a particular topic within Islam and Christianity is illustrative here. Without implying one-to-one equivalency, mysticism is an important subject for both religions. Islamic mysticism (Sufism) is classified under "Sufism. Mysticism. Dervishes. صوفية," a category also encompassing asceticism and monasticism. Christian asceticism and mysticism are classified across 80 numbers, BV5015-BV5095. Monasticism is filed separately under specific Christian denominations. For example, mysticism in the Armenian Church is at BX127.2-127.3, mysticism in the Orthodox Eastern Church at BX384.5, mysticism in the Catholic Church at BX2400-4563, and so on (Library of Congress 2024b, 259, 263, 321–44). Due to Christianity's extensive "real estate" at subclass level, Christian asceticism and mysticism's classification is comprehensively refined using unique pre-decimal numbers. In sharp contrast, Sufism is classified across only two numbers, BP188.45-BP190 (BP190.5 begins "Topics (not otherwise provided for)") (Library of Congress 2024a, 187). Although LCC has expanded to provide granular classification for Sufism, these refinements operate at post-decimal levels, further down LCC's organisational hierarchy. While LCC provides sufficient "real estate" to give full, nuanced representation of Christian mysticism's importance, depth, and complexity, juxtaposed to its Christian counterpart, Sufism is represented as less nuanced and accessible. There is conceptual imbalance as Sufism's diversity, range, and complexity is afforded lower levels of hierarchical significance than Christian mysticism. LCC's inequitable real estate not only reflects its historic biases, but continues to reinforce and replicate these same prejudices through unequal representation of religions to users.

Sufism's class marks are also practically more complex for users to navigate, impeding the ease with which users seeking material published on this subject can locate and access such items; Murphy, Long, and MacDonald stress users' difficulties navigating long LCC class marks (2013, 114). Retrieval is at once a practical and ethical concern: to "facilitate access and promote discovery" is an essential facet of cataloguing ethics (Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee 2022; Fox and Reece 2012, 378). Inadequate retrieval establishes further boundaries preventing readers accessing marginalised knowledge, compounding this material's exclusion (Olson 2001, 639). The question of retrieval in physical libraries is particularly important for theological libraries. Despite much theological reading shifting to digital formats, theology

students continue to turn to print libraries (Estes and Stephens 2020, iii; Penner 2009, 58). Indeed, many critiques of classification schemes remain applicable to knowledge organisation in digital spaces, from LCSH to tagging and other forms of metadata organisation. As this section demonstrates, classification is an ethical issue – knowledge organisation shapes how knowledge is represented to library users, and can perpetuate or attenuate harm (Bair 2005, 15, 18). An awareness of classification schemes' inequalities intertwines both theoretical and practical questions, demonstrating the importance of considering the impact of classification on the ground in the library, and working towards "practical moral solutions" to the persistent cultural biases and barriers to information access that library systems continue to reinforce (Baker and Islam 2020, 33).

In their assessment of LCC's classification of religion, Baker and Islam propose a radical reorganisation of the B-class along regional lines to place religions in their geographic and temporal context and de-centre Christianity (34–35). While this proposal remains theoretical, it recalls the (optional) reshapings of the DDC 200 religion class that have been put into practice in recent decades. DDC, like LCC, has attracted substantial scholarly and practitioner critique of its historical biases, in particular regarding race, sexuality, and disability (Clarke 2021, 254). From at least the 1960s, attention was drawn to DDC's Western and Protestant perspective, rendering it inadequate for many libraries in international, non-Christian, and non-Protestant contexts (Delfitto 2009, 499). Despite successive reforms across the 20th century as DDC internationalised and responded to specific historical and geographic contexts (Delfitto 2009, 503), in the standard DDC notation, Christianity and the New Testament continue to occupy a disproportional spread of classificatory real estate: 65 of the 100 classes in the 200s, in contrast to one class (296) dedicated to Judaism, and one class (297) shared by Islam, Babism, and Bahai (Fox 2019).

In addition to reforms to standard DDC notation, the scheme also provides optional provisions for libraries and areas where Christianity is not the predominant religion, in which Christianity is classified using a single number (298), and that library's main religion can occupy 220–280 (Option A), or adapt 210 (Option B; Fox 2019). Oh Dong-Geun and Yeo Ji-Suk suggest alternative adaptions suited to libraries in cultural and geographic contexts in which there is no single predominant faith, and classifications account equitably for the multiple needs of multi-faith environments (2001, 76). Most radically, in 2012 DDC published an "Optional Arrangement for the Bible and

Specific Religions", a complete reorganisation of the 200s with the stated aim to "reduce [the standard DDC notation's] Christian bias' and improve representation of other global religions" (Green 2019; Dewey 2012). The Optional Arrangement organises religions in regional and chronological order; the classificatory "footprint" afforded to specific faiths aims for more proportional representation, mapping onto a religion's number of publications, adherents, and "perceived cultural significance" (WebDewey 2012). Thus Christianity occupies 252–279 (28 classes as opposed to the 65 in standard notation), and Islam grows from one class to 18 (281–298; Fox 2019). While I have yet to find reports of the Optional Arrangement's implementation in any UK libraries, a number of accounts from US public and academic libraries observe that in practice the Optional scheme does provide more equitable treatment, greater granular specificity, and more useful colocation and subject browsing for non-Christian religions in comparison to standard DDC notation (Thornton 2024; Mathis 2020; McDonald 2020). All accounts of reclassifying the 200s to the Optional Arrangement are situated in public and academic libraries with general collections – that is, collections serving multi-faith or secular communities. In such contexts, it is appropriate – indeed, necessary – that collections and classifications aim for equal representation of religions without privileging any single faith over another.

For Christian theological libraries for whom the standard DDC (and LCC) classifications' historically Christian focuses neatly suit existing collections, attempts to respond to broader classification reform by enacting wholescale reclassification would be both impractical and counterproductive, moving towards schema that are less suitable for their collection needs (Harvey and Greenwood 2020, 2–3). Current and proposed reforms to DDC and LCC suggest that, after over half a century of classification convergence in UK libraries owing to shared catalogue records, standardisation movements, and (latterly) outsourced shelf-ready acquisitions (Broughton 2017, 481), going forwards there may be increased proliferation of optional and adapted classification arrangements. While classification schemes that centre Christianity have been the default standard since the 19th century, the DDC's Optional Arrangement, and ongoing debate about LCC reforms, position schemes focusing on Christianity as some of the many options tailored to specific religious, cultural, and geographic contexts. As I discuss in greater detail below, a multiplicity of classifications tailored to specific collection's needs are not a

significant departure from the current realities of classification in practice in many theological libraries, and can indeed productively cater to individual libraries' highly specific needs.

Perhaps the most important impact of classification debates and reforms for Christian theological libraries is an inducement to recognise our own specific, contextual situations and foster explicit awareness of why general classification schemes such as LCC and DDC work for our collections. That is to say, Christian-centric classifications are used because they are appropriately tailored to the particular needs of theological libraries' specifically Christian collections, institutional histories, or purposes, rather than because a Christian focus is an unspoken default epistemic position to which the classification of all other faiths should conform. This awareness – this forthright statement of a library's context and classificatory needs – enriches both library staff and users' understandings of collections' histories, strengths, and gaps. Naming an explicit positionality encourages an awareness of the boundaries of a library's expertise, and potential changes in the needs of the collections and user communities they serve. Engaging with debates around historical classification biases and unequal knowledge organisation enables Christian theological libraries both to better articulate the needs of core collections, and to responsibly approach the classification, representation, and access of the literature of other faiths.

Classification in ABTAPL Theological Libraries: Discussion

Against these dual backdrops of UK higher education libraries' engagement with decolonisation and general classification reforms, what is the current landscape of theological libraries in the UK? Using the ABTAPL Directory of Institutional Members 2024, I surveyed the publicly available library websites and online catalogues of current ABTAPL members for information on which classification schemes they use. As my discussion focuses as much on the ways that libraries frame and communicate their classification practices to their user communities as those practices themselves, I collected data only from institutions that publish information about their classification schemes or have open online catalogues; that is, institutions whose classification schemes form part of their public-facing presentation.

Within these parameters, of the 70 institutions in the ABTAPL directory, classification data was publicly available for 55 libraries, as set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification schemes used by ABTAPL members

CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER OF ABTAPL LIBRARIES
LCC only	18
LCC with other scheme(s)[1]	5
DDC only	14
DDC with other scheme(s) [2]	4
Nonstandard only (includes in-house, adapted, and specialised schemes)[3]	16
Nonstandard with other scheme(s)	5
Elazar	1

In summary, of the 55 ABTAPL libraries whose classification information I reviewed, the greatest proportion (23, or 42%) used LCC, while 18 ABTAPL libraries (33%) use DDC. One library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, is in the process of reclassifying from DDC to LCC (A. Knowlton, n.d.). This corresponds to broader long-term patterns across theological libraries worldwide; a 1984 survey showed more than 74% of US theological libraries used LCC (Peterson 1984, 106). It is also broadly in step with classification trends across UK higher education libraries; a 1967 survey of UK university libraries showed 41% of libraries adopting LCC (Friedman and Jeffreys 1967, 227), while Broughton's more recent 2017 survey of 50 UK universities reported 36% using LCC (483).

As noted above, different types of holdings have different classification needs, and many ABTAPL libraries accommodate multiple collections from working, lending holdings to closed store or special collections, each with individual classification demands. Of the 55 ABTAPL libraries whose classification information I reviewed, seven used multiple schemes concurrently (see Table 1). For example, the Gamble Library at Union Theological College has collections classified using both LCC and "old classification" schemes, as well as separate

sequences for special collections such as pamphlets and rare books (Gamble Library, n.d.). Classification practices are adapted to local conditions, tailored to institutional contexts, and the histories and needs of sub-collections.

It is striking that 21 ABTAPL libraries (or 38%) maintain nonstandard classification schemes. Nonstandard schemes are defined as a loose "spectrum" encompassing both entirely "home-grown," in-house classifications and specialised adaptations of global published schemes (Lee 2011, 26). I include here formalised denomination-specific adaptive classifications that are themselves in use globally, such as the Lynn-Peterson Alternative Classification for Catholic Books used at Heythrop Library (Gresser 2024; Lynn and Peterson 1954). The remarkably high proportion of ABTAPL libraries using in-house, local, and denomination-specific schemes noted above is not unusual in UK higher education contexts. Many UK universities retain classification schemes that are entirely in-house (as in the Cambridge University Library) (Waldoch 2015) or highly localised (such as the Garside scheme instituted by Kenneth Garside at University College London and the University of Leeds) (Meehan 2020, 16). Similarly notable is the high proportion of adaption and customisation of universal schemes used in ABTAPL members: of the 42 libraries using general classification schemes, over half apply some level of modification (see Table 2).

Table 2: ABTAPL members who customise or adapt a global classification scheme

CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER OF ABTAPL LIBRARIES THAT CUSTOMISE OR ADAPT SCHEME	ALL ABTAPL LIBRARIES USING SCHEME
LCC	13	23
DDC	9	18
Elazar	1	1
All global schemes	23	42

These modifications range from adoption of global denominational-specific adaptations to LCC and DDC, to significant in-house alterations such as alternative letter prefixes replacing LCC classes in Lambeth Palace Library, and more minor adjustments such as the

addition of authorial suffixes to DDC in use in Regent's Park College Library. In total, over two thirds of ABTAPL libraries use specialised, local, or modified classification schemes (see Tables 1 and 2). Once again, this conforms to longstanding UK library histories of classification modification. Friedman and Jeffrey's 1967 survey of UK university libraries noted that over three quarters of libraries using LCC applied some form of customisation or supplementary notation (Friedman and Jeffreys 1967, 228). Lee's more recent account of UK higher education art libraries similarly notes the enduring preponderance of adapted classifications, in particular for specialised libraries (Lee 2011; see also Currier 2002, 20). While the adoption of Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC)-led record-sharing in the 1970s and 80s, and more recently the growth of vendor-supplied shelf-ready classifications may have shrunk the proportion of UK higher education libraries using nonstandard or adapted schemes (Broughton 2017, 481–82), this review of ABTAPL members indicates that such schemes are alive and well in theological libraries.

While this brief overview of ABTAPL members' classification has concentrated on a quantitative account of classification schemes in use, it has highlighted the need for future qualitative research into not just how many libraries retain customised or in-house schemes, but why such schemes retain this strikingly robust presence in theological libraries. I speculate that a significant contributing factor is the highly specialised nature of theological libraries, created to serve one principal subject, and often related to a single faith, denomination, or tradition. Universal classification schemes that aim to describe all knowledge can be an inexact fit with specialised collections requiring in-depth classification of one specific knowledge area. Despite the critiques that LCC and DDC's Christian-centrism unduly privileges Christianity above other religions explored above, these universal schemes may not wholly serve the purposes of a specialised theological library either, and require customisation to make them fit for purpose. Julia Pettee, the creator of the Union theological classification scheme, for example, decreed the 99 digits DDC then awarded to Christianity in the 200 class inadequate for concentrated theological collections (Pettee 1937, 254). This complaint from 1937 neatly illustrates the problem of general schemes: inequitable for capturing diverse, multi-faith, and multi-denominational collections, yet not specific enough for collections focusing on a specific religion, tradition, or denomination.

This may be particularly notable in libraries serving single denominations – in particular those that are most active outside the US.

The Christian-centric nature of LCC and DDC is rooted in particular forms of 19th-century American Protestantism that can marginalise other traditions (Tan and Robertson 2018, 30). For example, the United Reformed Church (URC), an important denomination in the UK, is confined in LCC to less than one class mark: BX9890.U25-U258. It shares BX9890 with four other denominations from Curaçao to Australia. Conceptually, these denominations are marginalised, their complexities and depth minimised; practically, user browsing, access, and retrieval is impeded by homogenous and complex class marks. To tackle these problems, Westminster College Library, which serves the URC, applies some small-scale local customisation, expanding the URC over the unused class marks BX9891-9894 (Library of Congress 2024b, 471), rendering this locally modified LCC more suitable for the UK context of this denomination.

ABTAPL libraries also deploy more formalised modifications to universal schemes in order to target the needs of their denominational collections. For example, the Roy Graham Library, Newbold College, uses an LCC adaption for classifying Seventh-Day Adventists employed by more than a dozen specialist libraries worldwide, which expands LCC's original five class marks (BX6151-6155) to 46 (BX6101-6146), replacing classifications for Adventists more generally (Library of Congress 2024b, 390; Tan and Robertson 2018, 32). While this form of adaption (modifying class marks already in use in LCC) may not be suitable for theological libraries serving ecumenical, multi-denominational collections, for those serving specialist denominational libraries, it effectively modifies LCC to provide an appropriate level of granularity for its specific collection's needs. For libraries serving a Christian community, universal schemes like LCC and DDC may provide a "good enough" service with some customisation.

It is significant that the single ABTAPL member focusing solely on Judaism, the Leo Baeck Institute Library, does not use a general scheme, but an adapted version of the Elazar Classification (see Table 1), a specialised scheme for Judaica materials devised from the 1950s as a response to LCC and DDC's Christian-centric biases and inaccuracies in representing Judaism (Catanese 2023, 275; Hansson 2022, 116; Boeckler 2008). The Elazar Classification is structured intentionally to reflect Jewish "cultural history and practice" and its users' browsing habits (Schoppert 2014, 423; Elazar 2008, 21). For libraries serving a single faith community, such specialised schemes, tailored to a specialised collection and user group, offer robust alternatives to universal schemes like LCC and DDC.

Overall, then, the picture that emerges of theological libraries' classification practices suggests a high level of comfort with nonstandard, specialised, customised, and localised schemes that pragmatically and conceptually adapt to individual collections' needs. If discussion above has focused on how classifications are tailored to suit the needs of single denominations or faiths, the following section considers a brief case study of how such local and small-scale changes can be deployed to tackle collection-focused questions at points of historical gaps and interfaith encounter.

Local Adaptions and Small-Scale Change

Running through discussion of universal, global classification schemes' biases is the conclusion that it is impossible to design a "single, bias-free system that would be appropriate in all libraries" (Smith and Appleton 2023, 823). Indeed, the very project of pinning down a single description of all knowledge that LCC and DDC propose is rooted in a particular 19th-century universalism that seems out of step not only with practical realities of fitting classifications to individual collections, but with the plural, diverse range of experiences and understandings that today's users bring to our libraries (Kaipainen and Hautamäki 2011, 504). Instead, Olson and others advocate for local, responsive changes that suit the demands of individual libraries and users (Thornton 2024, 56; Smith and Appleton 2023, 842; Olson 2001, 639). Although local changes are inherently limited, they are also, through close engagement with individual collections and user groups, able to respond to their community's specific needs in ways that global, general schemes cannot (Pettitt and Elzi 2023, 5).

As the review of ABTAPL libraries' classifications suggests, theological libraries are well-placed to engage in this sort of local adaption. Indeed, modifications and customisations are already embedded in many libraries. Examples of what productive small-scale changes to address historical biases might look like in Christian theological libraries include assessing shelf labels for outdated language, reviewing the arrangement of non-Christian religions to ask whether they are accurately represented and easily retrievable by users, and evaluating whether the appropriate response to problem areas is reclassification or user education on the historical context of why certain knowledge structures or language are in place. Local changes also involve pragmatic assessment of available library resources to enact them – from

direct financial costs to staff time, particularly challenging for the many theological librarians working solo or in small teams and under tight budgets. In-house classifications and local adaptions can be labour intensive, representing ongoing commitments to perpetually update and adapt (Lee 2011, 30). Deborah Lee's concept of "guerilla reclassification" in her 2012 article "Guerrilla Reclassification: A Call to Arms", published in *Catalogue & Index*, is a helpful tool here to manage local adaptions. Rather than seeking wholescale reclassification, Lee focuses on rapid tackling of individual problems on a small-scale, case-by-case basis that works within existing library resources to target those areas in which change is most needed and would most directly benefit library users. Such small incremental changes contribute to long-term improvements of a library's classification practices (Lee 2012), offering theological libraries a realistic model for local classification reform.

A brief case study of classification adaptions in a multi-faith library brings into focus how small-scale customisations can be tailored to both community and collection needs. In June 2023, the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society reached an agreement to house their 1,000-volume collection in the Woolf Institute Library. After 40 years in a private residence, MIAS (an academic society "founded to promote a greater understanding" of medieval Muslim polymath Ibn al-'Arabī) sought a permanent, accessible home for its unique multilingual library (Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society 2019). The Woolf Institute Library, an interfaith institution focusing on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim relations, and dedicated to "improv[ing] tolerance and foster[ing] understanding between . . . different beliefs," was judged suitable. As David Perry (2023) observed, there are many resonances between Woolf's principles and Ibn al-'Arabī's "inclusive and undogmatic" philosophy.

While classifying and cataloguing this new collection, an important consideration was questions of how to sensitively treat Islamic spiritual works within the library. While there are cultural differences across the Islamic world, it is customary practice for the Qur'an and (by extension) other sacred books to be housed on top shelves, and especially not shelved near the floor (Long 2010, 214, 221; Museums, Libraries and Archives Council 2008, 41). As Dallas Long writes, "responsible stewardship of . . . holy works" requires libraries' adherence to expectations for "culturally-appropriate handling;" libraries have a duty to treat sacred works respectfully in culturally-specific ways (2010, 213). There is no provision within standard LCC or DDC for enacting such an arrangement. Minor local classification adaption responded to this collection's needs, aiming for care and attention

to cultural and religious specificity (Fox and Reece 2012, 381). The Woolf Institute uses an adapted LCC scheme: the simple addition of an S-prefix – denoting sacred books – appended to these works' classes marks a double sequence within the collection which could be shelved horizontally on the top shelves of each bay. These minor adjustments accommodate Islamic spiritual works' need for upper shelves while maintaining simple user retrieval and access. This case study also underlines the importance of collaboration, and libraries working alongside the communities they serve; academic and religious experts from the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society collaborated to advise on the shelving and selection of works requiring specific treatment. Working at the scale of individual collections, local classification adaptions contribute to sacred books' culturally-appropriate treatment.

As Long suggests, questions of whether such attendance to cultural sensitivity concerning religious texts has a place in academic libraries (scholarly rather than faith-related institutions) can be fraught, and open to politically-motivated opposition (Long 2010, 217). These questions look rather different for theological libraries in educational or research contexts. As institutions that serve both scholarly and faith communities, it is appropriate that when theological libraries encounter denominations, traditions, and religions beyond their own current or historical focus, they attend with care to collections' and users' culturally situated needs, considering appropriately tailored faith-specific classification and library practices. Local classification practices allow for inter-faith encounter and collaboration that hospitably opens up theological libraries to multiple user communities. Small-scale adaptions suggest ways in which local changes can go beyond global classification schemes to respond actively to individual collections' and user communities' needs, transforming libraries' ability to responsibly represent and provide access to their collections.

Conclusions

"[T]he classification of knowledge," wrote Julie Pettee in 1937, "is a living, growing thing. The book schemes are the garment. They need constant letting down and making over to fit." (256). Nearly a century later, Pettee's work remains a helpful prism through which to view the challenges and opportunities of theological classification discussed in this chapter. Her own work is rooted in a specific early 20th-century historical and cultural context centred on assumptions

of a dominant Western and White Christianity that UK theological educational institutes are working to dismantle through engagement with decolonisation activities (Pettee 1937, 255–56). Participating in debates over the ongoing inequities and biases of library systems such as classification, this chapter argues, equips theological libraries to productively contribute to such efforts, addressing mis- and under-representation within our holdings, and more effectively serving both collections and users.

Pettee's emphasis on the need to fit classifications to the actual books on the shelves (257–58) underlines that there is no one-size-fits-all classification scheme that will be appropriate to serve all libraries, tackle all historical biases, or represent all subjects. Throughout, the chapter has argued for the importance of tailoring classification schemes and adaptions to the needs of individual libraries, collections, and user communities. Engaging with critiques of Christian-centric general classification schemes does not entail a criticism of Christian-centred libraries, nor indeed inherently of the continued use of Christian-focused classifications in institutions for which they are appropriate. Rather, these critiques are a timely reminder that no libraries are neutral spaces for the objective organisation of knowledge: our classification choices actively reflect and communicate our distinctive identities. Theological libraries' awareness and acknowledgement of their own specific cultural, religious, and historical context prepares us to work towards equitable, ethical classification practices that approach all faiths and none with equal seriousness, respect, and hospitality, while maintaining our responsibilities to our core collections.

Finally, Pettee's evocative metaphor – the constant tailoring and re-sewing of a garment – drives home that just as our collections, communities, and priorities shift and grow over time, so must our classification practices. As this chapter's focus on small-scale, local, incremental changes suggests, classification is not a static, definitive document, but an iterative process that entails regular critique and re-evaluation within the pragmatic bounds of our resources. Addressing colonial knowledge structures and inequitable treatment of religions in theological classifications will look different in each institute and library. Rather than seeking a singular, definitive solution, this chapter proposes a starting point for long-term critical reflection and enquiry that centres the multiple, evolving needs of individual holdings, collections, and communities over time.

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Notes

1   Including three libraries using both LCC and local schemes concurrently, and one library using LCC and DDC concurrently: Regent's Park College main library currently uses DDC, but is reclassifying to LCC from 2025–27 (A. Knowlton, n.d.).

2   Including three libraries using both DDC and local schemes concurrently, and one library (Regent's Park College) using LCC and DDC concurrently.

3   Including the six libraries noted above running concurrent local schemes.

Theological Libraries in Ireland

Past Lessons, Present Strengths, and Future Challenges

JOY CONKEY AND LYDIA COLLINS

T*his chapter provides an overview of the current state of theological libraries in Ireland, that is, libraries of institutions which teach theology or train for church-based ministry. Threats which they have faced over the last seventy years, recent successes, and emerging challenges will be explored through librarians' survey responses. Lastly, the numerous benefits of ABTAPL membership will be examined.

Theological Libraries in Ireland

This section will present theological libraries in Ireland, giving details of their formation, growth, strengths and users. This chapter is based on responses provided by the institutions' librarians.

Belfast School of Theology (Formerly Belfast Bible College, BBC)

Belfast School of Theology (BST) began in 1943 under the name "Belfast Bible School and Missionary Home" in a private home in Windsor Avenue, Belfast, with one student. This student was joined later in the year by another, and within three years the increase in numbers meant new premises were needed. In 1946, the college moved to Thronemount, north Belfast (Scott 1998, 4–5).

Minimal information is available about the library's origins and composition. However, student testimonies reveal that there was a small library at Thronemount, which was not well stocked or managed, and books were not always useful for assignments. The room was very small and the building was not in good condition (Grant and Moore, pers. comm., November 7, 2024).

In 1965 the college moved to Marlborough Park South, Belfast, with the purchase of no. 119, and later no. 125, to provide for residential students and the growing number of evening class students (Scott 1998, 15). Little is known about the library's development from then until 1973 when James McKeown joined the college as its only student. Then a room in no. 125 held a very small library. Book stock was 5,000 volumes. There was no library budget since college finances were constrained. James McKeown joined the college staff in 1986, becoming the librarian. Without a budget, innovative measures had to be taken to provide new books. McKeown held book sales to raise money. Eventually, a £300 budget was given for library resources, increased to £8,000 when a full-time librarian was appointed, enlarged to £14,000 by 2012.

As increased capacity was required at the college, portacabins were installed at the Marlborough Park site. Around 1981 the library was moved into one of these.

The college moved to its present site at Glenburn Road South, Dunmurry, in 1983. The library relocated to its present building in 1988. In 1994 a new library block was built (Scott 1998, 32). A new reading room was added in 2011, which provided extra space for bookshelves as well as a study space. In 2018, study carrels were added to encourage individual working and maintain a quiet atmosphere. An RFID security system was installed in 2019.

The library currently has 19,000 volumes, with an extensive range of biblical, theological and exegetical literature. There are also 900 pamphlets, and 80 print journals, including 10 current subscriptions. In addition, the library subscribes to several databases through EBSCO,

including Atla Religion Database, Atlas Plus, and EBSCO's Religion and Philosophy Collection.

Special collections include a section on Amy Carmichael and the Dohnavur Fellowship, a collection of books in Arabic, and a Missions special collection, which contains histories of various mission organizations and biographies. The Amy Carmichael collection was started by Dorothy Anderson, the librarian during 2005–2012, and developed by her successor, Caroline Somerville. The books in Arabic were the suggestion of an Iranian student who wanted to see Arabic literature made available to international students.

The library's main user groups are college students and external users, including local ministers and past students.

Church of Ireland Theological Institute: Representative Church Body Library

The Church of Ireland's Representative Church Body (RCB) Library originated in 1901 with a small lending library on the Crumlin Road, Belfast. It was part of the Guild of Witness which had been founded in the same year by Rosamond Stephen (1868–1952) and Rev. Raymond Orpen (1837–1930) with the purpose of enabling Church of Ireland members to better understand the claims and history of the Church and to enable them to witness to others. From 1918, when the Guild of Witness was renamed the Irish Guild of Witness, its primary focus became promoting the use of liturgy from Irish origins, in Irish, and encouraging the study of Irish history. At this point the Irish Guild of Witness Library and Archive was relocated to Dublin. Rosamond was concerned about the long-term future of the library and so offered it to the Representative Church Body in 1926, but they turned it down. This caused Rosamond to enter into a deed of trust with the Archbishop of Dublin, John Gregg, the Bishop of Meath, Benjamin Plunket and others in 1928, when the library and archive was renamed the Sir James Stephen Library. Despite the change of name, Rosamond and the Irish Guild of Witness Committee remained concerned about the collection and thus continued to pressure the RCB. Eventually, in 1931, the RCB agreed to acquire the library's collection and arranged for its relocation from Ardfeenish in Mount Street to the RCB headquarters in Stephen's Green during Christmas 1931. Around 5,000 volumes were relocated. In January 1932 the RCB established a committee for the management of the library. Regulations for library use and measures to promote its

collecting policy were devised, and efforts made to record significant donations. Mr. John Roy was appointed as librarian for six months and began the task of cataloguing, using the Dewey Decimal Classification System, the Stephen collection along with the print collection of the RCB Library previously stored throughout departments in the Stephen's Green building. After Mr. Roy resigned, Miss Geraldine Fitzgerald was appointed in July 1932 as the first permanent, full-time Librarian. Six librarians have served in RCB Library.

In addition to the book collection, RCB Library has extensive archival collections. In 1925 the RCB appointed an Ecclesiastical Records Committee in response to the 1922 destruction of the Public Records Office of Ireland, when more than 500 collections of parish records, medieval and early modern diocesan archives, were lost.[1] The committee's first members were prominent clerical historians who focused on collecting copies of Church of Ireland manuscripts that had been destroyed in 1922. These records were catalogued and held securely with other rare materials in the RCB building's basement strong room. Manuscript donations were encouraged. Thus, the RCB records became the primary sources replacing those lost in 1922.

In October 1969, the library moved to its current location of Braemor Park, Rathgar. The library joined the campus of what was then known as the Divinity Hostel which later became the Theological Institute. Generations of ordinands gleaned what they needed for research and training for ministry through the library. In 1969 it held 18,000 volumes. In 1980 an archivist was appointed and an agreement was made with the National Archive of Ireland which stated it was the official place of deposit for all Church of Ireland registers in the Republic of Ireland.

Today the library holds 70,000 books and large pamphlet and periodical collections. It seeks to acquire a copy of all publications relating to the Church of Ireland. Principal subject areas in the hardcopy collection include: ethics, theology, biblical studies, spirituality, homiletics, liturgy, mission, and church history. The library is the Church of Ireland's repository for its archives and manuscripts. Noncurrent records from parishes, dioceses, cathedrals, the General Synod and the RCB are regularly transferred to the library. Therefore, it holds collections of parish records, the archives of the Church's dioceses, cathedrals, architectural drawings, administrative records of the RCB and its committees, and thousands of manuscripts relating to the Church and prominent clergy and laity, from medieval times to the present. The library also holds the Irish Huguenot Archive. The RCB

Library contains printed books dating from 1552 onwards, such as early *Books of Common Prayer*.

Currently RCB Library is associated with the Virtual Treasury of Ireland, which attempts to reconstruct the content of the PROI lost in 1922, making it searchable and freely available.

Since it is an integrated library and archive, it has a variety of users who can access a multitude of resources under one roof. The print collection is mainly used by students and staff of the Church of Ireland Theological Institute. The archives and manuscripts are consulted by researchers from Ireland and abroad.

Dublin City University

The Milltown Library was originally established by the Irish province of the Jesuit Order to support their third level institute of philosophy and theology: Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy. In 2019, the library was transferred to Dublin City University (DCU) under an initial 10-year agreement with the purpose of forming the nucleus of a new library in Woodlock Hall. The Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy Library contained 140,000 volumes of monographs, periodicals, pamphlets and early printed books. Around 18,000 of the most used volumes are now accessible to researchers in the Woodlock Hall Library, Drumcondra. The Woodlock Hall Library was restored ahead of the relocation to the highest environmental and architectural standards and was awarded one of the Architectural Association of Ireland Awards in 2022 and commended in the Royal Irish Architects Institute Awards.

The main strengths of the collection are philosophy, theology, scripture and dogmatics. DCU holds 10,000 early printed and rare items in the Special Collections and Archives facility in the O'Reilly Library in Glasnevin. This also houses 5,000 early printed items from the Archdiocese of Dublin, which largely relate to theology and religion. Today, the Woodlock Hall Library's main users are DCU students and staff.

Edgehill

Since 1868, students studying for ministry in the Methodist Church in Ireland were trained at Methodist College, Belfast. Separation of the

Theological Department from the Methodist College was approved by the Methodist Conference in 1926 and Edgehill Theological College at Lennoxvale was opened in 1928. The library was originally housed at the back of the main building. This was a multi-purpose space with a lecture room and side rooms for private study. Shelving on the walls provided storage for the book collection. This library served generations of ministry students and other readers.

Following a redevelopment of the entire Edgehill site, completed in 2002, the wing behind the college was reconstructed to provide a conference centre and more extensive library accommodation. The theological library found a new, more spacious home on the ground floor of the new building, with a dedicated study space alongside shelving to hold 16,000 volumes. This specialist theological library was designed to support learners at the higher education level, up to and including doctoral studies. Collection strengths included ecumenical theology, Irish Christianity and Methodist studies.

The 2000–2002 redevelopment included the creation of specialist accommodation for the archives of the Methodist Historical Society in Ireland (MHSI), which were relocated from Aldersgate House, University Road, into a purpose-built centre with storage and study facilities. The MHSI Reading Room includes rare documents of a demographic nature, the Complete John Wesley series, hymn book collections, memoirs, and letters, which are stored in temperature-controlled conditions. The Methodist Historical Society has progressively taken custody of the Connexional archives, with the consent of the Methodist Conference. Around eighty-five percent of Irish Methodist historical Connexional and Circuit records are stored in the MHSI archives. Therefore the MHSI is becoming the primary point of contact for those investigating Irish Methodist heritage. The MHSI develops an awareness of Irish Methodism and theology through talks, visits to Circuits, and its journal, the *Bulletin.*

In 2019, following further redevelopment of the Edgehill premises to accommodate the relocation of all Methodist Church in Ireland Connexional teams, the theological library was moved into a new Learning Resources Centre, and the book stock streamlined to 6,000 volumes. All theological students are now overseen by the Ministries Team of the Methodist Church in Ireland which has an academic partnership with Cliff College, Derbyshire. All Cliff registered students have access to over 600,000 theological texts, 60 million articles and 21,000 journals through the Digital Theological Library. While retaining elements of the earlier theological library, the Learning Resources

Centre, Edgehill House, focuses on providing resources which support formation for mission and ministry, whilst also facilitating wider access to learning and development resources across the Methodist Connexion.

The Gamble Library, Union Theological College

The Gamble Library was established in 1873 thanks to a generous donation of £1,500 from Mrs. Caroline Anne Gamble. The money was used to convert the Common Hall of the Presbyterian College into a library, and to purchase 2,500 books. It was named the "Gamble Library" in memory of Caroline Anne's late husband, the Rev. Henry Gamble, who had been minister of Ballywalter Presbyterian Church. At the union of the Synod of Ulster and the Secession Synods in 1840, which formed the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the libraries of both Synods were brought together, but it took Mrs. Gamble's donation to create an adequate library.

From 1855 the library was managed by a member of the faculty with a "sub-librarian," one of the ministry students, working under his supervision. This continued until 1909 when the college received the bequest of Miss Isabella Brownlee of Lisburn, which brought an annual income of £125. The Board of Trustees appointed to decide how this money would be spent determined that it should be used to appoint a permanent librarian. The first librarian, Mr. J.W. Kernohan, M.A., was appointed on 1 January 1910. Ten librarians have served in the Gamble Library.

Prior to the construction of Stormont, the first Parliament of Northern Ireland occupied the college for eleven years, the Commons meeting in the library. Part of the library was temporarily relocated to 2 University Square.

Initially staff and students of the college could use the Gamble Library, with alumni and other Presbyterian ministers permitted to use the library on the payment of a fee. This was extended to Methodist ministers in 1925 and then ministers from the main Protestant denominations by 1943. Today anyone can be a library member, on the payment of a fee. Life membership is open to college alumni.

Originally there were two Presbyterian colleges in Ireland: the Presbyterian College, Belfast, established 1853, and Magee College, Londonderry, opened 1865, a liberal arts college which also trained individuals for ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. In

1953, the Magee University College Londonderry Act brought about a separation between the Arts Department, which retained the name Magee University College, and the theological training department which became Magee Theological College. Magee University College had a library which primarily served college staff and students so contained arts and theology books. When the separation occurred, the library retained the theological books belonging to Magee Theological College. Magee University College became the New University of Ulster in October 1968. Around this time the Theological College requested the return of books belonging to it. A significant number of books, including rare books, the Magee College Pamphlet collection, and periodicals were transferred to Magee Theological College or the Presbyterian College, Belfast, in the early 1970s. When Magee Theological College and the Presbyterian College were united by an Act of Parliament in 1978 to form Union Theological College, the remaining Magee Theological College books were transferred to Union College.

In 1981, the Gamble Library was extended by the addition of a mezzanine floor above the far end of reading room one. This area was used to house rare books, some of which came from Magee College. Extra bookcases were added to the main library.

Major refurbishment work was carried out in 2002–2003, and the library was temporarily moved to the chapel. Another mezzanine floor was added at the opposite end of the main reading room, with rolling stacks and more security to house the rare books. A computer suite was added where the rare books had previously been stored. During this period, efforts were made to reorganize part of the collection using the Library of Congress Classification system and create a computerized catalogue. A basement storeroom was built in 2011 to store the least used books, older journals and archives. During the summer of 2014, a trial of Atla Databases was organized. Since then, the library has subscribed to this resource, also acquiring e-book access from 2015. From 2019, the library has provided access to three other databases and several e-journals.

Today, the library has 64,000 books, 20,000 pamphlets and regularly receives over 50 journals. It holds several special collections: a rare books collection with items dating from the 1540s, the Magee and Assembly's Colleges Pamphlet Collections of ephemera from the 1600s to 1800s, and the Presbyterian Mission Archive. It primarily exists to support college staff and students, but also has around 350 life members who are college alumni and 60 annual members.

Irish Baptist College

The Irish Baptist College (IBC) was established in 1892. It was originally located in Dublin and had a library. The college moved to Sandown Road, Belfast, in 1964. The move prompted a major clearout of dated material. Dr. David Kingdon, then principal, insisted on deliberately overspending the library budget so that the stock remained up-to-date. The college moved to its current location in Moira in 2003, and the library was renamed the John B. Craig Library. He was a former student who pastored Windsor Baptist Church before emigrating to Canada where he continued to pastor. He and his wife, Marion, were keen supporters of the college's work. A new library annex was added to the building in 2010 permitting an additional study suite which seats 32 students. Today the library is used by the college's undergraduate and postgraduate students, full and part time teaching staff, and occasionally serving Baptist pastors.

The library has 13,000 books with strengths in biblical and historical theology. It contains key texts for the College's students as well as providing postgraduate research material. The library holds the archive of the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland (minutes of meetings, material on Baptist Missions). It also holds the entire collection of the *Irish Baptist Historical Society Journal* (1968–2023), *Insight/Irish Baptist Magazine* (1878–2024) and the *Baptist Magazine* (1809–1861). There are incomplete holdings of the *Baptist Record* and *Baptist Messenger*. The library holds collections of some Irish Baptist pastors' sermons. Also, a collection of IBC students' postgraduate theses.

Irish Bible Institute, Dublin

The Irish Bible Institute (IBI) has its roots in the Irish Bible School, Coalbrook, Tipperary, which was founded in 1982. A significant portion of the library was donated from the Evangelical Library in Dublin, which was closing, bringing the total number of volumes to 5,000. The books were catalogued according to the Dewey Decimal system, and the library was staffed by volunteers, supplemented by college staff.

In 2001, the Irish Bible School merged with The Leadership Institute and became the Irish Bible Institute. At this time, the library moved and was housed in a church building in Pearse Street, Dublin. New mobile shelving was installed, and a part time librarian, Heather Maiden, employed. The library used a card catalogue and Dewey Decimal system.

In 2005 the library moved to the current IBI premises in Ulysses House, Foley St., Dublin 1. It was a purpose-built library space with new built-in shelving, and study carrels. Heritage library management system was introduced. In 2009, the library of Carraig Eden Theological College, Greystones, was transferred to IBI Library, when IBI became the official training institute for the Pentecostal Christian Church Ireland.

The library holds 10,000 volumes, with strengths being biblical and theological, particularly Bible commentaries. It contains an Irish section covering history, culture and politics.

Main user groups are students and teaching staff, along with some external members who are in Christian ministry.

Maynooth University Library

Maynooth University Library (MUL) serves both Maynooth University and St Patrick's College, Maynooth (now St Patrick's Pontifical University and St Patrick's National Seminary). The library was established in 1795 and is now housed in the John Paul II Library and the Russell Library. Special Collections and Archives at Maynooth University are spread over these two sites.

The main strengths of MUL include its Bible collection, comprising 2,000 items in 600 languages and featuring many high points of Bible publishing. Also, archival collections relating to the history of St Patrick's College, the Irish College at Salamanca and All Hallows College, as well as an example of a diocesan Cathedral collection – Otway-Maurice Collection of St Canice's Cathedral Library.

Russell Library

The Russell Library contains approximately 34,000 printed works dating from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century across a range of subjects including: theology, mathematics, science, geography and history. Other important collections include medieval and Gaelic manuscripts, archival material and incunabula. The reading room was designed by renowned British architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–1852) and completed in 1861.

In 1986, the Hibernian Bible Society, now National Bible Society of Ireland, deposited their Bible collection on permanent loan to the Russell Library. This collection spans eight centuries, the earliest dating from the thirteenth century.

The Thomas Furlong Collection contains approximately 1,349 antiquarian books, with items from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. This collection was donated following the closure of the House of Missions in 1993. It is a rich representation of Christian doctrinal and theological literature, containing works of ecclesiastical history, scripture, theology, philosophy, ethics and liturgy.

The archives of St Patrick's College, the Irish College at Salamanca and All Hallows College can be accessed in the Russell Library.

John Paul II Library

The John Paul II Library also contains theological special collections and archives, which were mostly printed after 1850.

An important and unique collection is the Otway-Maurice Collection of St Canice's Cathedral Library which is on long-term loan to MUL from the Representative Church Body of Ireland. It features over 3,000 titles printed before 1850. Many of the works are theological but works on history, the classics, law, literature, and science also feature. There are archival collections of Father Peadar Ó'Laoghaire and Desmond Forristal.

Main MUL user groups are students of Maynooth University and St Patrick's Pontifical University, and the seminarians of St Patrick's National Seminary.

Mary Immaculate College

Mary Immaculate College (MIC) in Limerick was founded by the Catholic Sisters of Mercy and is now academically linked with the University of Limerick. There is a Department of Theology and Religious Studies within their Faculty of Arts and a theology collection in the library to support this.

The MIC Library has both a historical theological library and a current academic library for post-primary education.

St Patrick's College Thurles opened in 1837 as an educational institution for boys, both lay and clerical students. By 1874, it admitted only clerical students. The original library's exact location is unknown. However, when the new College Chapel was constructed in 1888, the Library moved to the space it vacated, which was notable for hosting the Synod of Thurles in 1850. The library was officially named after

Archbishop Croke on his death in 1902. The college officially closed as a seminary in 2002 and instead began to offer initial teacher education at post-primary level. At that point, the Croke Library remained as a special collection, and a more modern library was constructed in a newer wing of the building. St Patrick's College integrated with MIC in 2016 and is now known as MIC Thurles. MIC Limerick and Thurles both hold several theological collections. MIC Thurles Croke Library contains 10,000 books, covering theology, philosophy and diocesan history.

As the Croke is a special collection, the main user groups are historical researchers.

Reformed Theological College Library

The Theological Library is part of the Reformed Theological College, situated in the grounds of Knockbracken Reformed Presbyterian Church on Knockbracken Road, Belfast. The College primarily trains candidates for the ministry of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. It also offers theological training for church leaders and youth in the wider church.

The library was founded in 1843 by the Rev. Dr. Thomas Houston, minister of Knockbracken Reformed Presbyterian Church, for the use of ministry students. In 1854 the Reformed Theological College was started by the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The college and its library were in College Street South Reformed Presbyterian Church, later renamed Grosvenor Road Reformed Presbyterian Church. The college and its library met there from 1854 until 1972, apart from a brief nine-year period in the early 1900s.

In 1972 after repeated bomb damage[2] to the Church premises on the Grosvenor Road, the college and its library moved to Cameron House on the Lisburn Road. In 2005 the college and library relocated to purpose-built premises at Knockbracken.

The theological library has over 6,000 books. There is a separate Historical Library which contains all the issues of the denomination's magazine which dates from 1830. It also contains all the Minutes of Synod from 1827. There is a special collection of pamphlets and books relating the history and doctrines of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. The library is used mainly by college students and faculty as well as ministers and members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Roman Catholic Institutions Which Taught Theology

There has been a significant decline in the number of Roman Catholic institutions which teach theology both for academic study and the priesthood. Twomey (2003, 141) outlines how "extraordinary numbers joined the priesthood and the religious life," a trend which peaked in the 1960s, then decline began, interrupted by an increase after Vatican II in the number of lay people studying theology. Hoban (2013, 40) provides numbers of students in Irish seminaries from 1990 to 2013. In 1990 there were 525 in total and just 70 in 2013, an 87% decrease. This has been reflected in the number of institutions, and their libraries. In 1994, the seminary in Kilkenny closed, followed by Waterford and Wexford, Thurles, Clonliffe, Carlow, All Hallows and Belfast. These include: the Mater Dei Institute of Education, Milltown Institute, and All Hallows College. Their library holdings have seemingly been absorbed by larger university libraries or sold. Space does not permit an account of their histories and holdings. Notably, Twomey (2003, 219) states, "there are few libraries in Ireland with the necessary resources for scholarly research, apart perhaps from Maynooth, Trinity College, and the Milltown Institute."

Trinity College Dublin

Trinity College Dublin (TCD) was created by royal charter in 1592 and its Library was established then. It is the largest library in Ireland with over seven million printed volumes, extensive collections of journals, manuscripts, maps and music. *The Book of Kells* and the *Book of Durrow* are its most famous manuscripts. Other special collections include the Ussher Collection. In 1801 it was endowed with Legal Deposit privilege.[3]

The library supports learning and research needs across all disciplines at TCD. A major research library of international repute, it provides services to a wide range of external users and institutions. Its exhibitions attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually.

TCD Library also has a small number of Hebrew texts, which was enhanced by the addition of the Zuger/Robinson Collection on Jewish Studies in 2004. The Research Area in the Eavan Boland Library contains a complementary collection with a strong emphasis on Patristics. Its shelves include almost complete runs of the following series: *Patrologia Latina*, *Patrologia Graeca*, *Patrologia Orientalis* and the *Corpus Christianorum*, amongst others.

The Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE), founded in 1970, is now part of The School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies at TCD. A specialist library on conflict resolution and reconciliation studies existed from the establishment of ISE, and at one stage collections were in Dublin and Belfast: Bea House Library, Dublin, held some 35,000 volumes and 683 Antrim Road, Belfast, had a small library (Hurley 2008).

TCD's Library collections exist for the benefit of not just the university's students but for a wider range of scholars and the public. According to Ayris, Maes, and Raymaekers (2022), the library has developed a significant collection of electronic journals and books, widening the library's reach to benefit scholarly and public engagement, a "core part of its mission" and is also "home to the research outputs of the University, hosting the institutional repository, and the business records of the University."

Whitefield College of the Bible

Whitefield College of the Bible is an independent theological college established by the Free Presbyterian Church, primarily as a training College for its ministers. Inaugurated in 1981 when it moved from the Martyrs Memorial Church to its own building in Banbridge, Whitefield College offers a four-year theological course for ministry candidates and a two-year course for Christian workers and those preparing for the mission field (Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, 2024). Students at the College are mainly members of the Free Presbyterian Church, but entry is also open to students from other evangelical churches (Kyle 2002, 232).

The library was established in 1981 with the new College. New books were bought in line with college needs and a part-time librarian managed the library. The library is currently at Martyrs Memorial Church, Belfast, where lectures are taking place while a new college is being built. The new building will contain a purpose-built library large enough to accommodate the collection. At present, few books are being purchased as space is limited, but this will change when the new library is opened.

The library is composed of Bible commentaries, theology, and church history books, reflecting its reformed theological position.

Table 1: Perceived Threats, 1956 to the Present

PERCEIVED THREATS	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Decreasing budgets	5
Decreasing student numbers	4
Rising costs	3
The impact of online education	3
Changes in theological education	3
Online resources preferred to print	3
Wider institution not understanding or engaging with the library	3
Decreasing space for collections	2
Building issues	2
Security	2
Miscellaneous threats only mentioned once, e.g., noise levels, providing services during the pandemic, losing historical materials during two relocations.	13

Threats, Successes, and Challenges

This section presents the most frequently occurring themes in the librarians' responses to a survey conducted in October 2024, examined in light of relevant literature. Librarians were asked to name three major threats faced by their library in the past 70 years, identify a success achieved by their service, and pinpoint emerging challenges. Efforts were made to contact the librarian or relevant staff member of each theological library in Section A before the survey was emailed to a total of twelve in October 2024, with the initial deadline of early November. All libraries responded eventually, four after follow-up contact by email, phone and online meeting, with some providing more detailed answers than others. Forty-three responses were received from currently serving and retired staff in Irish theological libraries concerning threats to their libraries from 1956 to the present. These were coded into themes and the most common themes are presented in Table 1.

Decreasing Budgets and Rising Costs

Five librarians reported that their budgets had been reduced, mainly because of a decline in student numbers. Furthermore, three librarians noted that resource costs have increased significantly, aggravating this issue.

For several libraries such as the IBC, the library budget is linked to student intake. If student numbers are low, their budget will be small. This may have serious implications, for IBI budgetary restraints mean they no longer employ a librarian; volunteers are used instead.

Rising costs of journals, textbooks and e-books have made managing the budget more difficult. According to Keck (2018, 35) "there remains a significant disconnect in the rising . . . costs for publishing versus the declining expenditures among theological libraries." Mowat (2013, 393) notes that when Elsevier purchased Pergamon Press with its significant stock of journals, it retained the same policy that Pergamon established by increasing costs "year by year without any reference to true costs." Academic publishers, knowing "that universities were a captive market" kept increasing prices (Mowat 2013, 393). If universities were feeling the pinch with the rising costs, how much more would smaller theological colleges? Many small theological colleges reached a point when they were unable to pay such high prices and had to cease certain subscriptions. Even TCD, the largest library in Ireland, has found rising e-book licensing costs challenging. In 2020, with the increased demand for e-books, librarians struggled to meet the extortionate costs involved and were frustrated by the limited number of e-books available. The #ebooksos campaign began in the UK with its primary objective "to call for an investigation into the academic ebook market," and continued in Ireland due to what they called "the electronic content crisis facing libraries and library users" (The Library Association of Ireland, 2025).

Changes in Theological Education and the Impact of Online Learning

Three librarians stated changes in theological education have threatened their libraries, with a further three identifying the impact of online learning posing a notable challenge.

Over the past seventy years numerous changes have occurred in the nature and delivery of theological education which have impacted on library resource provision.

Gale and Reekie (2008, 7) summarise these as: the 1990's drive to consolidate training provision in fewer institutions; the development of more flexible part-time training pathways; changing attitudes to mission-impacting mission training institutions; and a "more rigorous quality assurance regime" which has precipitated closer ties with local universities who are validation or accreditation partners. They state, "For some libraries these changes have brought closure, merger, or relocation," and for those linked to university validating partners, "questions about access to resources, reciprocal arrangements, and duplication" (Gale and Reekie 2008, 7).

Two responses mention an accreditation partner, Queen's University Belfast (QUB), the consequences of that partnership, and the changes which resulted when QUB terminated this in 2019. A consortium of colleges was established to create the Institute of Theology, QUB, which included Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and Catholic colleges, as well as the interdenominational Belfast Bible College. This arose as QUB "was . . . forbidden by its charter to teach theology" (Cheesman 2009, 188). While academic standards were increased, and students received university-accredited awards, colleges had less control over course content, which could only be changed with the consensus of all colleges (Cheesman 2009, 188). The library collections of the Gamble Library and BBC had to keep pace with curricular changes as well as the move to other accreditation partners, namely St Mary's University, Twickenham and the University of Cumbria.

Three responses indicate that the move to online learning changed students' expectations. More digital resources and 24/7 online access are expected, with the physical library generally decreasing in importance. Kennedy and Laurillard (2023, 1) while noting that new technologies in education were being developed during the first twenty years of the twenty-first century, state "the possible futures for online learning received a remarkable uplift from . . . the COVID-19 pandemic." Online learning is now an accepted part of academia and "has brought a revolution in redesigning library services" (Shahzad and Khan 2023, 544). It can assist with the "successful implementation of user-centric services" producing higher student satisfaction (Shahzad and Khan 2023, 529). Numerous barriers to implementation of e-learning technologies exist, such as librarians' lack of skills. ABTAPL has and does assist with the upskilling of staff through the annual conference which

offers CPD sessions, online training sessions covering a wide range of themes, and emails with suggestions of other training opportunities offered to librarians.

Decreasing Numbers Studying Theology

Four librarians reported that decreasing student numbers was a significant threat. Three of these responses were from institutions which train for ministry (Edgehill, RTC and MIC). Ultimately, declining student numbers produced the closure of MIC as a seminary in 2002. BST linked declining numbers to difficulties getting visas for international students.

Decreasing student numbers have been reported throughout the UK. For instance, the Rev. Dr. Mark Cartledge, Principal of London School of Theology, stated "recruitment is challenging, and numbers are lower than pre-pandemic levels . . . I anticipate that some programmes will close, others will be streamlined and merged" (Church Times 2024). Churches are employing various strategies to maintain or increase ministry intake numbers. For example, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have "ministry interns," "ministry taster days," and "flexible pathways" for training. The Roman Catholic Church experienced a drastic decline in numbers joining the priesthood and religious orders so that, "in the Autumn of 1997, the country woke up . . . to the sensational news that no-one had entered the seminary in Dublin that year" (Twomey 2003, 142). As Gribben (2021, 215) states, "the collapse in clerical recruitment in the Catholic Church compares to declining recruitment into the ministry of the principal Protestant denominations."

Improving Library Spaces

Twenty-seven librarians responded to the survey questions regarding success achieved by their service (see Table 2). Nine librarians stated that they viewed building renovations, extensions, conversions, or new builds as by far their biggest successes. The fact so many had experiences with notable changes in their library buildings reflects the "significant development of learning space in university libraries" which has occurred since the turn of the century in academic libraries generally (Matthews and Walton 2014, 238). As Vos states (quoted in

Table 2: Successes. Twenty-seven responses were received

SUCCESSES	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
New build, building renovations, extensions, or conversions	9
Expanding the physical collection	3
New library management system/ online catalogue/ self-issue and return facilities	3
Expanding the electronic collection	2
Digitization and open access initiatives	3
Rare books conservation projects	2
Miscellaneous successes only mentioned once, e.g., weeding the collection to make it more relevant, partnership to give access to more e-resources.	5

Khan and Thebridge 2022, xvii), "the design of that library is critical in helping the staff to serve its community." It is clear that Irish theological libraries are considering the needs of their communities. Evidence suggests libraries are aware of physical needs and those related to particular learning styles, not just to comply with legislation, such as the Equality Act (2010) and Disability Discrimination Act (1995). John Paul II Library, for instance, has had several major renovations over the past 15 years, including a €20 million extension opened in December 2012 and, more recently, a major renovation of the older west wing. These incorporate study spaces, group study rooms, a "wellness zone" with "energy pods" for students to nap in and a "Cubbie sensory hub," an immersive multisensory space where neurodiverse students can reduce their sensory overload. TCD's library has similarly gone through a major refurbishment to allow students and staff with different sensory preferences to flourish. The IBC reported the provision of more study spaces, while BST added a new reading room in 2011, which provided additional space for bookshelves and study. The RTC moved to purpose-built library facilities in 2005. Khan and Thebridge (2022, 124) state that "the physical library in the first two decades of the 21st century has undergone a major transformation from collection-centric to user-focused space, in line with changes in society and a rapid pace of

technological development." Consideration is being given both to physical and digital collections, and access to these, in library design. Much literature points to libraries providing space to collaborate, which is reflected in responses from Maynooth and TCD. As Matthews and Walton (2014, 241) state, students attach a lot of importance to libraries as part of their higher education experience, so if theological librarians are effectively designing and using their spaces it is a success the library community should be celebrating. It will be crucially important that we "continue to adapt to make . . . buildings fit for purpose for the collections they hold, physically and digitally, and the range of services they provide to increasingly diverse communities" (Khan and Thebridge 2022, xxv).

Expanding Physical and Electronic Collections

Responses indicate that librarians feel that their efforts to expand their libraries' physical and digital collections have also been successful. As Brophy (2005, 130) notes, collection management, including stock selection, "lies at the core of the academic librarian's work . . . [it] is essential if the library's users are to have access to the information they need." Surveyed librarians' additions to the physical collection came through donations in IBC, or the collection of primary archival materials in RCB Library. As Calhoun (2017, 118) states, "special collections and archives are what remain most distinctive about research library collections" – they are unique and therefore appeal to particular users. Effective collection management requires "comprehensive knowledge" of the subject and its literature, and "most important of all, excellent understanding of the needs of users, both current and – most difficult of all – future" (Brophy 2005, 118). The expansion of electronic resource collections was also counted as a triumph by several libraries, including the Gamble Library and BST Library, both of which have seen an increase in online students numbers recently. Atla's 2024 Global Survey (Kutsko 2024) results reveal that two of the top five ways in which theologian librarianship is changing include "the increase in online education" and the "increase in digital resources." Doubtlessly this will continue; hence theological librarians need to be aware of new e-resources, such as Perlego, and relevant issues, including digital rights management.

Embracing New Technology to Support Research

Several of the librarians stated that they are embracing new technologies to support research. These technologies include digitization (RCB) and open access initiatives including an institutional research repository (Maynooth), which make unique collections and research freely available online. Other libraries (Edgehill and IBI) are installing new library management systems (LMS) with online catalogues making their collections more discoverable and searchable, which may include new self-issue terminals (Edgehill and BST).

Calhoun (2017, 118) asserts that, "the results of cultural heritage digitization projects suggest that if . . . special collections were more discoverable online, they would attract new users and uses." Therefore, there is huge potential in heritage digitization projects, especially given the unique collections of Irish theological libraries. They also preserve valuable assets. Small libraries often need to work with larger institutions or companies (e.g., Hathi Trust, Google) who have the resources to enable digitization, make its products available online, and backup digital files. Obtaining long-term financial commitments from funders is one of the biggest challenges facing digitization projects (Khan, Shafi and Ahangar 2018, 5).

Maynooth is involved in open access (OA) initiatives. They have created transformative agreements, are establishing and promoting institutional repositories, and advocating for making research freely available online. As IFLA (2022) states, "Libraries are uniquely positioned to support the equitable and inclusive development of publishing opportunities, including serving as infrastructure for publishing initiatives and educating authors about pathways for publishing their works open access." Maynooth is one of the larger institutions surveyed, which may explain their ability to be significantly involved in OA. Given cOAlition S's Plan S, to make publications which are publicly funded immediately and fully open access, the European Commission's appointment of an Open Access Envoy and, the UK's Research Excellence Framework, which requires all outputs to be open access, OA is likely to be an increasingly important area for all libraries. Without doubt "much more work needs to be done" (Calhoun 2017, 207) in terms of making theological research OA, but whether this is feasible in smaller theological libraries is questionable.

Writing in 2008, Gale and Reekie (2008, 25) stated that "most theological institutions now have a computerized catalogue, and many have moved to a fully automated system." This shows not all theological

libraries had this technology then. All the libraries involved in the survey had an LMS with an online catalogue and would seemingly agree with the literature which lists numerous advantages of having this technology, such as it "allow[s] timely access to current information, increases customer satisfaction, increases retrieval rate, improves service delivery" (Mamatlepa and Maluleka 2024, 3). Although some research has found a lack of motivation to change LMS due to factors such as shrinking budgets, mounting prices for these systems and complex migration processes (Dalling and Rafferty 2013, 400), three libraries have invested in new LMS. This has made their collections more discoverable and visible, allowing researchers to access details of their collections at a convenient time. Although the future of the traditional LMS is uncertain, (Crump and Freund 2012, 11) this is progress for small theological libraries.

The Challenge from Electronic and Online Resources

Twenty-seven librarians responded to the survey questions seeking to pinpoint emerging challenges (see Table 3). Six responses asserted that one of the biggest emerging challenges came from online and electronic resources: specifically, the rise of online library platforms such as Perlego, and students' preference for online resources compared to print. Several librarians expressed concern at the rise of online library platforms which made material easily accessible and are arguably making libraries obsolete. Perlego has seen considerable growth since its 2017 creation, with over 250 institutions and 100,000 students using the platform globally, which gives access to over one million e-books. Two librarians perceived students had a preference for online resources, or simply searched the internet for information, rather than using hardcopy collections. One response expressed concern that this would be worsened by AI.

The Academic Reading Format International Study, the largest and most comprehensive study of students' reading format preferences, actually found that "the vast majority of students throughout the world would prefer print or either format over electronic only," for their readings (Mizrachi et al. 2021, 262). Those who preferred print did so as they believed they had "better learning engagement and outcomes," with less detrimental physical effects, for example, eye strain (Mizrachi and Salaz 2020, 817). Convenience and accessibility were the most motivating factors for students using electronic format (Mizrachi and

Table 3: Twenty-seven responses were received

EMERGING CHALLENGES	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Ensuring the collection remains relevant	3
Online resources preferred more than hardcopy resources	3
Online library platforms, e.g., Logos, Perlego	3
Promoting the library within the institution, denomination, and generally	3
Developing information literacy skills including in relation to AI	3
Preserving special collections	2
Lack of staff	2
Miscellaneous challenges only mentioned once, e.g., increasing opening hours, equitable access to resources, diversifying collections.	8

Salaz 2020, 814). Many other studies over the years have found a similarly strong student preference for print (Mizrachi et al. 2021, 252). The implications for libraries are that the question is no longer when print OR electronic format should be used but rather "WHEN is print, electronic or either format preferable" (Mizrachi et al. 2021, 263). Mizrachi and Salaz (2020) found that format preferences were contextual, determined more by personal learning styles and goals than technological trends. As Chohda and Kumar (2023, 38) assert, "libraries have to comprehend the right blend of print and e-resources," which requires a knowledge of their institutions' unique learning culture and student populations to understand which format would be best in any given context.

The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns had a significant impact on students' internet use as they became "reliant on the internet for all academic activities," since access to physical libraries was not possible (Salubi and Muchaonyerwa 2023, 526). This has formed habits such as an overreliance on the internet for research with students failing to evaluate information sources, settling for whatever they find online. Librarians have a key role to play in "offering training on efficient

and effective use of internet-based tools and resources," "digital skills and competencies" training so they can "navigate the online world responsibly and make informed decisions," and "use the internet in a healthy and balanced way" (Salubi and Muchaonyerwa 2023, 528). Libraries are sources of especially curated, reliable, scholarly information which serve their research communities. We need to actively present our essential educational role and the wealth of high-quality resources our libraries contain to our stakeholders. The next section reflects further on advocacy.

Advocacy and Engagement for Survival

Six librarians felt that promoting their libraries and the resources they contain so that they are used is another major emerging challenge. The audiences to receive promotional messages included the institution, their denomination, and the wider religious and academic community. The desire for the collection to remain relevant to the related teaching schools and library members was an overriding concern.

It is more imperative now than ever that librarians promote their libraries and resources – it is a "central activity of the profession" (Hicks 2016, 615). Societal and cultural shifts in today's distraction-rich world mean that all sectors are being challenged to demonstrate "relevance, need and value for money" (Kendrick 2021, 1). As a result, "library and information services are often losing market share" (Kendrick 2021, 3). Librarians seek to promote the library and its resources to generate usage, but aim at something more than this. It is about creating an involvement with the library which leads to an ongoing relationship, during which engagement deepens, and the co-creation of services is enabled (Kendrick 2021, 1). In this way, the library service can stay relevant to its users and also innovate to ensure continued relevance. Innovations can attract new users.

Responses saw the building of relationships as necessary at three levels: institutional, denominational, and the wider community. Over a decade ago, *The ABTAPL Guidelines for Theological Libraries* (Gale and Reekie 2008, 37) included the suggestion that theological libraries are becoming "increasingly dependent on institutional support," hence they need to raise the library's profile and "demonstrate its value." This is even more true today. Stakeholders want to know how allocated funds are being used to meet information needs of clientele: costs and outcomes are crucial. For denominational libraries, the denomination

represents a source of financial and practical support, providing a ready-made network of potential members and natural supporters. Most other libraries simply seek to reach those who would be interested in their collections from the wider academic community. This is a significant challenge for numerous reasons, including the difficulties of how to reach and communicate with a very disparate group.

A planned strategic approach to marketing and engagement is required to ensure the library offer is clearly and attractively stated and communicated (Kendrick 2021, 2). Networks like ABTAPL and CILIP's Impact Toolkit (CILIP, n.d.) can assist in the development of that plan, anticipating future needs, and upskilling librarians.

Information Literacy After the AI Revolution

A lesser emerging challenge identified in three responses was equipping library members with the information literacy (IL) skills to function in today's world, which includes embracing positive aspects of AI, recognizing relevant academic sources, but not plagiarizing, and exercising critical thinking.

AI by its nature "challenge[s] our understanding of information literacy" (Hirvonen 2024, 47). The use of AI technology has seen rapid growth in all sectors and is now used to perform many routine tasks. AI systems are being used to mediate our interactions with information and are integrated into wider systems of technologies so that they permeate every aspect of our lives, in everything from search engines, personalized results, autofill forms, and chatbots. In effect, we have delegated our active searching efforts and evaluation of information to AI. The concerning question is this: Who makes the decisions and evaluations for us and on what grounds? Commercial companies? Can anyone actually tell? AI can also homogenize the information we are exposed to, narrowing our information landscapes as it personalizes results based on our preferences. In response to this, librarians need to teach IL skills which aim to increase understanding of AI, including "raising awareness of the operations of AI technology . . . as well as new skills such as prompt engineering" (Hirvonen 2024, 50). "New strategies" may also be required to influence the information we are exposed to, such as displaying multiple identities online to avoid unwanted personalization of content (Hirvonen 2024, 50). As Murovana (2020, 49) asserts, "the important part" of IL is "critical thinking." Furthermore, "In order to reach 'cognitive and behavioural autonomy' it is a must to

be critical about theoretical and practical knowledge of information communication work, how digital platforms and devices mediate our information interaction, and how the AI systems of search engines, social networks and recommender systems operate" (Murovana 2020, 52). IL has been linked to critical thinking for some time, therefore existing IL frameworks, such as the ACRL Framework, can be adapted to incorporate the teaching of IL skills connected with AI (James and Filgo 2023; Bryan 2014; Goodsett and Schmillen 2022).

A major aspect of concern expressed by librarians is likely linked to "the need for ongoing professional development . . . in AI technologies and pedagogical practices" (Walter 2024, 20). Librarians feel they lack sufficient knowledge of AI to teach effectively, added to by the fact AI is developing so rapidly.

The Benefits of ABTAPL

This final section will examine how ABTAPL has helped member libraries and their staff over its 70-year history. Of the twelve libraries surveyed, four are current ABTAPL members. Members were asked to describe how ABTAPL was beneficial to their library and them as information professionals (see Table 4).

Surveyed ABTAPL members felt one of the most important benefits of ABTAPL membership was the networking opportunities it provided, both through in-person events and online meetings and communications, like the discussion group. This is especially true for solo librarians. This network presents the opportunity to get advice from others and glean from the network's combined experience.

The annual residential Conference was similarly viewed as a significant benefit for reasons such as:

- High-quality training on relevant topics
- Opportunities to hear from publishers, professional bodies like Atla, and service providers, such as EBSCO
- Inspirational library visits
- Heritage User Group meetings
- Conferences, which brought librarians together to share best practice, successes, and encourage each other.

Member discounts for electronic resources, journals and books were similarly advantageous. Free online training and the sharing of resources, including interlibrary loans, were noted as other merits.

Table 4: Benefits of ABTAPL

BENEFIT	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Networking	3
Residential Conferences (included training, library visits, connecting with publishers etc).	3
Member discounts	3
Online training	2
CPD resources	2
Sharing resources (e.g., interlibrary loans)	2

ABTAPL has been an invaluable support to members as they faced and overcame numerous threats throughout its history. To effectively face emerging challenges, like those presented by electronic and online resources, the difficulties of engaging with stakeholders, and the work required to teach IL after the AI revolution, Irish theological librarians will need, more than ever, to be actively involved with, and learn from, the ABTAPL network. The ABTAPL network provides opportunities to develop skills and share experiences to face these challenges. ABTAPL should take note of the emerging challenges identified by librarians in Ireland and ensure their training and discussions address these. Theological libraries who are not current members should consider joining ABTAPL to experience its benefits for themselves.

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Notes

1   The Public Records Office of Ireland (PROI) was destroyed on 30 June 1922 at the start of the Irish Civil War. Anti-treaty forces occupied the Four Courts complex, which incorporated the PROI, and there was an explosion and fire. The fire spread to the Record Treasury, destroying many key historical documents.

2   This bomb damage was caused by the Troubles, a conflict which lasted for around 30 years from the late 1960s until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. It was marked by clashes between Republican and Loyalist Paramilitaries and the British security forces, which impacted on civilians.

3   This is the statutory obligation on publishers and distributors to deposit one copy of every publication, without charge, in designated legal deposit libraries. This is to preserve the nation's published heritage.

Mapping the Landscape of Theological Libraries in Scotland

The Last Seventy Years

> *"At the present moment, however, what is of the most urgent nature, is the establishment of a Library."*
>
> — Rev. Professor David Welsh, at the foundation of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843 (Welsh 1843)

CHRISTINE LOVE-RODGERS

The majority of my working life has been spent at New College Library, University of Edinburgh, the library that was urgently founded by David Welsh in 1843. This large and thriving theological library reflects the Christian and Presbyterian traditions that formed its historic collections, but also supports a present-day School of Divinity that teaches a diverse range of faith traditions and beliefs. Next door, a favourite coffee spot is a café occupying a space that was once occupied by the Centre for Studies of Christianity in the Non-Western World Library. Now, only library-themed wallpaper hints at the rolling stacks and library safe formerly located there. This contrast between theological libraries past and present inspired me to journey through the landscape of libraries over the last seventy years, and reflect on the transition to the theological libraries we have in Scotland today.

In December 1959, the Rev. J. A. Lamb, Librarian of New College, Edinburgh, published a survey of "Theological and Philosophical Libraries in Scotland" in the *Library Association Record* (Lamb 1959). The Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL) went on to further describe Scottish theological libraries in the *Guides to Theological and Religious Studies Collections* in the UK and Ireland published in 1986 (Lea and Jesson 1986) and 1999 (Kerry and Cornell 1999). In this chapter, I have used these ABTAPL *Guides* to trace the footprint of theological libraries in Scotland over the last seventy years and through it glimpse their working lives, the journeys their collections have made and their meanings to the communities they served and continue to serve. My methodology has been to take the Scottish libraries listed in the 1959, 1986 and 1999 ABTAPL surveys and ask, "Are these libraries still there?" and then, "What changed for them?" I have gathered my information via institutional websites and published literature where this is current and sufficient for the purpose. To fill gaps in my knowledge, I have also approached librarians, ministers and church workers at a number of institutions directly, and I owe thanks to everyone whom I have bothered with my questions about theological libraries.

This chapter is a celebration and a reflection on the paths that theological libraries in Scotland have taken. But just as we may not be in control of the slow erosion or sudden landslides that shape the Scottish landscape, theological libraries and librarians may not be in control of the wider forces that have shaped their landscape and determined how a library's journey continues, or if it comes to an end. The final question explored is what ABTAPL can do to support Scottish theological libraries on the roads they are yet to travel.

Seeking Scotland's Theological Libraries

> "...our pieces of paper are echoes and vestiges of this passage of the Lord Jesus in the world."
>
> – Address of Pope Paul VI, to Ecclesiastical Archivists. Thursday, 26 September 1963 (Paul VI 1963)

Supporting Scholarship of Religion and Theology

Setting out on my journey with the ABTAPL *Guides* as my gazetteers, the natural first stops on my journey were Scotland's university

libraries, the sector in which I've worked for over twenty years. It is easy to see how university theological library collections are supporting scholarship of religion and theology (although even a tiny library may hold unique treasures that draw scholars). The 1959 survey and 1986 and 1999 ABTAPL *Guides* detail the rich theological libraries of the four ancient universities of Scotland: St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. In 1959, as well as the unique and historic research collections, university libraries existed with multiple layers of print provision – as well as the university library, there were departmental libraries, and sometimes class libraries often kept in the classrooms for each subject area, which all provided multiple copies as working tools (Lamb 1959, 330). All four of these universities have moved their main library into a new building in the last seventy years, with implications for their theological collections. At St Andrews, transferring the main library facilities to a new University Library building in 1976 allowed the King James Library at St Mary's College to become a specialized Divinity library (University of St Andrews 2024). The Hay Fleming Reference Library, listed in the 1986 ABTAPL guide, was also transferred into University of St Andrews Library and Museums in

Image 1: University of Glasgow Library. This image is in the public domain.

2000. Glasgow University Library's new building, opened in 1968, held early printed texts that included "many Bibles, works of Biblical criticism and sermons" (University of Glasgow 2024). St Andrew's College of Education, a Catholic teacher training college which had libraries at multiple campuses detailed in the 1986 ABTAPL Guide, merged these libraries with the University of Glasgow in 1999 (University of Glasgow 2024).

The University of Aberdeen Library's rich and diverse collections of theological books, manuscripts and archives moved into the newly built Sir Duncan Rice Library in 2012, succeeding the former Queen Mother Library (Aberdeen n.d.). Edinburgh University Library's new building was opened in 1967, housing its rare religious and theological collections for the University, less than a mile away from New College Library's very significant theological collections. By the 1990s, Edinburgh University Library's multiple copies of teaching materials and general collections were already being pared down, and by the time I arrived in 2004, the last of the Divinity class libraries were being rationalised and absorbed into New College Library. The integration work during this period in university libraries placed legacy collections on Christianity and Biblical Studies together with collections relating to Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and other faiths as well as broader anthropological and cultural studies collections.

While much consolidation, amalgamation and rationalisation of Scotland's established theological libraries in universities was happening in this period, there were also new developments. Between 1960 and 1975, the new discipline of Religious Studies had begun to appear in the curricula of Scottish universities (Walls, 1990, 40). A significant project for theological libraries began in 1973 in the new Department of Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen. With new staff appointed from Africa and Asia who brought fresh perspectives on library materials, a documentation project at Aberdeen University assembled collections on "Christianity in the Non-Western World" (Walls 1990, 43). What later became known as the Centre for the Study of World Christianity (CSWC) was moved to the University of Edinburgh in 1986. Here, it offered an extensive library collection including mission archives, periodicals, and pamphlets. When the CSWC Library had to vacate its premises in 2006, the considerable archive collections were moved into the keeping of the Centre for Research Collections at Edinburgh University Library. Some CSWC collections moved to support the new Andrew F. Walls Centre in Liverpool (Liverpool Hope University 2024). The CSWC book
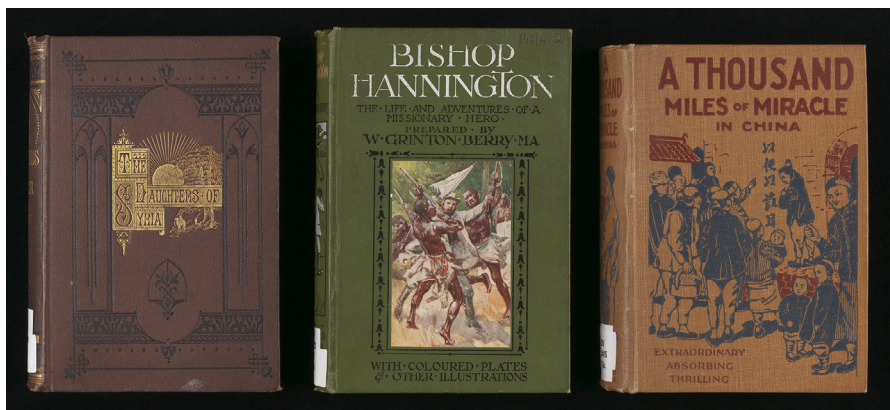
Image 2: World Christianity titles from New College Library collections: Bishop Hannington: The Life and Adventures of a Missionary Hero (1910); A Thousand Miles of Miracle in China (1906); The Daughters of Syria: A Narrative of Efforts by Mrs. Bowen Thompson for the Evangelization of the Syrian Females (1872). Photo by University of Edinburgh, used with permission.

collections were managed as a separate collection in New College until 2015, when approximately 8,000 unique volumes from the collection were integrated into New College Library.

Religious Studies as a subject area in the UK had gained momentum following the Robbins Report in 1963, which proposed that all who are qualified to pursue full-time education should have the opportunity to do so (Robbins 1963). This created an expansion of higher education across the UK, and the establishment of another four Scottish universities. Two of these (Dundee and Stirling) offered courses relating to theology and religious studies. Dundee University added philosophy as part of its new Social Sciences Faculty (Humes 2018, 76), and Dundee University Library appears in the 1986 Guide with "considerable holdings supporting the Philosophy of Religion" (Lea and Jesson 1986, 88), along with other religious special collections and archives. Stirling University was established in 1967, "initially with an emphasis on liberal arts but gradually expanding" (Humes 2018, 76). The 1986 ABTAPL Guide notes Stirling University Library's foundation in 1966, but that it was not extensively developed until 1974, coinciding with the development of "a more diverse programme of Religious Studies" (Cox and Sutcliffe 2006, 19).

Last, but not least, Highland Theological Institute (HTI) was founded in 1994 (Cameron 2006, 8), as part of the newly formed University of the Highlands and Islands. It appears in the 1999 guide with a library of 40,000 volumes. From small beginnings in an outbuilding in the

grounds of Moray College, Elgin, HTI expanded and moved to its own premises in Dingwall as Highland Theological College. Along with the Rutherford House Collections (more about them later), the acquisition of the theology collections from Fort Augustus Abbey enriched the library (Cryle and Stirling 2023, 18), supporting the college's ethos as a non-denominational college.

Image 3: Highland Theological College Library. Photo by Mark Stirling, Highland Theological College, used with permission

Fostering Ecumenism and Partnerships

Scotland is a small country and correspondingly small numbers in ministry training led to ecumenical partnerships. A seminary for the training of ministers for the Episcopal Church of Scotland had been established for some time at Coates Hall in Edinburgh (Smith 2013, 448). In the 1970s, a new partnership enabled the Scottish Congregational College to move into Coates Hall, where the two Colleges shared some lectures (Luscombe 1994, 29). The 1986 ABTAPL guide lists a library of 12,000 volumes, noting that it also contained the library of the Scottish Congregational College. In 1989, Coates Hall became the base for the Episcopal Church's Theological Institute, which also had a remit for

training of the laity (Wright and Badcock 1996, 249). In 1995, three small libraries were amalgamated – Episcopal Theological College, St Colm's College (Church of Scotland) and the Congregational Church College – to form the United Scottish Churches' Open College (SCOC) Library (Buck 1999, 4). When in 2004 the Church of Scotland withdrew funding for the United SCOC Library, the library closed (Buck 2005, 5). About 4,000 books from the United Library moved to the library of the International Christian College in Glasgow, which also took on the provision of library services to the Theological Institute of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Scottish United Reformed Church College (Bond 2006, 4). In 2014, a new partnership created the Scottish Episcopal Institute, which welcomes candidates for the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church as well as the Scottish Episcopal Church. Library support is provided by a postal loans service by partner libraries and a digital library service as part of the Common Awards scheme (Scottish Episcopal Institute 2022).

The Baker Library supported the work of Scottish Churches House, Dunblane, and was listed in the 1999 ABTAPL guide. Formally opened in July 1960 by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, this ecumenical centre was shared by multiple Scottish denominations and was gifted an ecumenical library by Bill and Barbara Baker (Fraser 2003, 22). Following changes to St Colm's College in Edinburgh, residential courses for the Scottish Churches' Open College moved to Scottish Churches House, and the United (SCOC) Librarian also took charge of the Baker Library. However, this arrangement ended with the closure of the United Library in December 2005 (Buck 2005, 5). Scottish Churches House itself closed in 2011 and the premises are now run as a small hotel (Old Churches House 2024).

Enabling Ministry Training

An emphasis on academic study has traditionally been as part of ministry training in Scotland and this has been supported by university libraries. Candidates accepted for training were required to undertake undergraduate or post-graduate divinity degrees at one of the five Church of Scotland-affiliated colleges and centres (based in the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, St Andrews, Glasgow, and Highland Theological College). After completing theological studies, candidates entered a period of probation, including practical ministry experience and further postgraduate study, which lasted 15–24 months.

Unlike in the Church of England, where theological education developed to be delivered through a network of small theological colleges (Dowland 1997, 1–8), in the Church of Scotland theological education was always, and continued to be, located in the universities.

A key marker in Scottish church history is the 1843 split of the Free Church of Scotland from the established Church of Scotland,[1] which created three separate theological colleges and libraries for its ministry training: New College Edinburgh, Trinity College Glasgow, and Christ's College Aberdeen. These rapidly developed into sizable libraries, and when in 1929 there was a reunion of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, their libraries merged and grew further, retaining their original purpose as libraries for ministry training. In the last seventy years, these major libraries have made changes to transfer their management or ownership from church to university. In 1962, the New College Library collections were given on loan to the University of Edinburgh by the Church of Scotland (Wright and Badcock 1996, 200). This change to University management enabled New College Library to undertake essential and expensive remedial works to the building in 1974 (Wright and Badcock 1996, 199), and again in 2019–2023 (Love-Rodgers 2024).

Image 4: Students in New College Library. Photo by Paul Dodds, University of Edinburgh, used with permission.

By 1973, all Glasgow Divinity teaching had been moved to the University (Asplin 1993, 6) and Trinity College Glasgow Library was transferred into the ownership of the University of Glasgow in 1974. The Church retained ownership of its early printed books, identified as over 3,000 items printed before 1801, which are held in Glasgow University's Special Collections (Trinity College Glasgow 2023). The remainder of the Trinity College Glasgow Library collections have been absorbed into Glasgow University Library's collections. Christ's College Aberdeen was the smallest library supporting Church of Scotland ministry training, with approximately 40,000 volumes (Lamb 1959, 329). Rare book collections from this library have now passed into the Special Collections at the University of Aberdeen (Attar 2016, 447) and the original Christ's College buildings were sold in the 1990s (Aberdeen University – The School of Divinity n.d.). The working theological library collection was relocated to rooms in King's College Aberdeen, now operating as a library for students of the School of Divinity.

Image 5: Inside Edinburgh Theological Seminary Library . Photo by Edinburgh Theological Seminary Library, used with permission.

Ministry education is also provided by New College Library's next door neighbour, the Free Church College, which changed its name to the Edinburgh Theological Seminary (not to be confused with the [Episcopalian] Edinburgh Theological *College*) in 2014. This library

appears in the 1986 ABTAPL guide as numbering 40,000 volumes, located in multiple study areas and classrooms in the college. Students have historic access rights to the print collections at New College Library, and library e-resources are accessible via the validating partner institution, the University of Glasgow. More profound changes have been made by the Scottish Baptist College (SBC), listed in the 1999 ABTAPL guide with a library of 12,000 volumes. In 2001, the College moved to the Paisley campus of the University of the West of Scotland (UWS; Scottish Baptist College 2024). SBC have partnered with UWS who have fully integrated the former Baptist College Library collections into the UWS Paisley campus library. SBC are also partners in the Digital Theological Library (Digital Theological Library 2024) which supports their course teaching (Meiklejohn, pers. comm., Oct 10, 2024).

Forming Catholic Ministry in Scotland

At the time when Lamb wrote in 1959, a major project was underway in the west of Scotland to build a new college for Catholic seminary students, St Peter's Seminary at Cardross, which opened in 1966 (Wenell 2007, 259). Now famous for its abandoned Brutalist architecture, St Peter's Seminary in Cardross lasted a relatively short time, beset by building faults and a shortfall in the number of seminarians. It closed in 1980, with its operations transferred to Chesters College, Bearsden in Glasgow. With the additional closure of Blairs College Aberdeen in 1986, Chesters College became the major seminary for all Scottish dioceses (except the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh). According to the 1986 guide, it was the home of St Ninian's and St Columba's Library.

St Andrew's College at Drygrange near Melrose was a Catholic seminary with a library which, according to the 1986 ABTAPL guide, had amassed 20,000 volumes with an impressive 1,000 volumes added each year. In 1986, this seminary moved to Edinburgh and took the name of Gillis College (Kerr 1986, 4), depositing a rare book collection of over 2,300 volumes at the National Library of Scotland (National Library of Scotland 2024) as it did so. But "numbers at Gillis were never high, and in 1993 it was closed" (Wright and Badcock 1996, 253). While the site continued to operate as the Gillis Centre, the library collections went into storage. At the time of writing, the future of the remaining Gillis library collection had yet to be confirmed (Clark, pers. comm., July 19, 2024).

In 1993, after Gillis College closed, Chesters College was reconstituted as Scotus College, which operated as a single national Catholic seminary for Scotland until closure in 2009. Since then, all training of Scottish candidates for Catholic priesthood has been in England or abroad. In 2023, the Bishops of Scotland donated the former Scotus College library to The Seat of Wisdom Seminary in Owerri, Nigeria (McHugh, pers. comm., Nov. 5, 2024). The 650 volumes in the Scotus College rare books collection remain in the ownership of the Archdiocese of Glasgow as part of the St Peter's College Museum (Attar 2016, 485), which should reopen in the new premises of the Bishops Conference of Scotland in Glasgow in 2025 (ICN 2023).

Preserving religious cultural and intellectual heritage

Whilst exploring digital newspaper archives looking for libraries, I was reminded of a story that made the headlines about the Scottish Catholic Archives (SCA), an institution appearing in the 1986 and 1999 *Guides*. The SCA's story began with Blairs College Library, Aberdeen, described by Lamb as "the main source in Scotland for the history of the post-Reformation Catholic Church in Scotland" (Lamb 1959, 332). In Lamb's time, Rev. William Anderson had worked to transfer the Blairs College archives to Columba House, Edinburgh in August 1958 (Cairns and Reid 2009, 250), creating the repository and research centre that became the SCA. Uniquely, the SCA brought Diocesan and Parish archives into one location, together with other major archives such as Blairs College, pioneering "a system which is being explored by other Catholic Dioceses around the world" (Scottish Catholic Archives 2024). In 1974, 27,176 volumes from the historic Blairs Library were deposited at the National Library of Scotland (University of Aberdeen n.d.-a), twelve years before the closure of Blairs College itself in 1986. However, in 2012–14, the Blairs College book collections returned to Aberdeen, to the Special Collections Centre at Aberdeen University (University of Aberdeen n.d.-a). Then, in 2013, the SCA Historical Collection moved to the University of Aberdeen, Special Collections, on a 30-year loan (University of Aberdeen n.d.-c), significantly augmenting the University of Aberdeen's role as a research centre for Catholic heritage collections. The modern SCA collections were held in storage or dispersed back to their dioceses. This relocation of archive collections from Edinburgh to Aberdeen and other locations caused passionate debate that reached as far as the Vatican (Morton

2012), revealing a community that cared deeply about the religious cultural and intellectual heritage preserved by the SCA. In 2023, it was announced that the Bishops Conference were relocating and consolidating the SCA to one central location in Glasgow (ICN 2023), due to reopen in 2025.

Another notable Catholic library of "about 35,000 volumes" (Lamb 1959, 333) was housed at the Abbey of Fort Augustus (St Benedict's Abbey) including "a large number of the works published by English Catholics from the time of Henry VIII to that of George III." This library continued as a working theological library until 1992, when the Fort Augustus Collections were deposited with the National Library of Scotland (NLS; Marshall 2012, 333). With the dissolution of the Fort Augustus Community in 1999, most of their library books were sold. "The University of the Highlands and Islands purchased some books, the Theology collection went to Highland Theological College and the Celtica Collection to Sabhal Mor Ostaig on Skye. The NLS purchased 759 volumes, which are now a special collection. The Cassidy Collection . . . remains with the NLS on deposit" (Marshall 2012, 334).

The mention of the NLS is significant. Though it has its historic roots in the more ancient Advocates Library, the NLS came into being in its present form in 1925 (McGowan 2006, 248), and a new library building opened in 1956 (McGowan 2006, 250). In the years following the opening of this building, the NLS was active in building theological collections which gather in the cultural religious heritage of Scotland from all denominations, several of which have been already mentioned (NLS Special Collections catalogue). Currently the NLS's permanent exhibition of treasures includes a Gutenberg Bible, and recent temporary exhibitions and displays have celebrated the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible and the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It is a theological library *par excellence.*

Also open to the general public as cultural heritage visitor attractions are the Leighton Library, Dunblane and the Innerpeffray Library, Crieff. These small rare book libraries appear in the 1986 guide because of the religious nature of their collections. Mark Towsey's study of Georgian reading habits remarked that "the Leightonian Library was clearly run to a large extent for the . . . religious community – certainly ministers . . . were amongst the most prolific borrowers" (Towsey 2010, 150). Jill Dye's extensive study of the Innerpeffray Library notes that "overwhelmingly, religion marked the core of the collection" (Dye 2018, 34). Today, these two libraries are scholarly resources, with Stirling University providing

Image 6: Library of Innerpeffray, from Graveyard. Photo by Duncan McEwan, Library of Innerpeffray, used with permission.

the online catalogue and managing research access to the Leighton Library collections (University of Stirling 2024).

Encouraging Spiritual Well-Being and Personal Devotion

Many theological libraries are formed for the education of the ministry and the research of scholars, but some mentioned in the 1986 and 1999 ABTAPL *Guides* were formed for the spiritual support of wider communities. The Mitchell Library, Glasgow, is one of Europe's largest public libraries with more than a million items in their collections, with strengths in Scottish Protestant theology. Edinburgh Central or City Library appears in the 1986 and 1999 *Guides* as having 15,000 volumes of religion related collections. I can vouch that today, Edinburgh City's lending collections contain a wide range of materials in LC Classmark B, and upstairs in the beautiful and historic Reference library, reference works and scholarly materials for Biblical and religious study are still in evidence. An historic counterpart to these public libraries is found in the Allan Ramsay Library, Leadhills, Biggar and the Miners' Library, Wanlockhead, both appearing in the 1986 guide. These libraries were formed by lead miners in two reading societies, the earliest

working-class subscription libraries in Britain (Joachim 2022, 30). Books on religion were frequently donated to these libraries (Joachim 2022, 44) and Joachim's analysis of the library holdings in both sites shows that religion was by far the largest subject category of titles. However, both libraries had ceased to be used for their original purpose by 1966, and today they are open primarily to weekend visitors looking to understand the miners' lives. Together with the Leighton and Innerpeffray Libraries, there is probably far more known and published about the religious literature in these historic libraries than about religious literature in contemporary UK public libraries. In rare cases when modern religious library collections are researched, it seems often to be in the context of religion as risk – as with the recent paper on creationist literature in public libraries (MacDonald and McMenemy 2012). Much remains to be understood and explored about religion in Scotland's public libraries today.

Of course, libraries created for the use of religious communities also appear in the ABTAPL *Guides*. After a long post-Reformation absence, Benedictine monks had reoccupied the medieval Benedictine foundation of Pluscarden near Elgin in 1948 and their library appears in the 1986 and 1999 ABTAPL *Guides*. Karen Attar's 2016 survey (Attar 2016, 495) identifies 15,000 volumes. In 2016, a new building appeal was launched, which included as one of its aims "a new monastic library of over 40,000 books available to the general public" (Pluscarden Abbey 2016). In summer 2024, the Abbey reported steady progress on the basement area planned to house the library and archive (Pluscarden Abbey 2024).

The Karma Kagyu Samye-Ling Tibetan Centre Library in Eskdalemuir, Dumfriesshire, makes a fledgling appearance in the 1986 guide, supporting the monks and visitors at this Buddhist centre. At this stage the Library was small and "still under organisation" (Lea and Jesson 1986, 111) but it stands out as the only non-Christian Library listed for Scotland in any of the ABTAPL *Guides*. Now with over 11,500 volumes (Jones, n.d.) it is a thriving, volunteer-run library.

Equipping Evangelism

Alan Jesson's chapter on the history of theological libraries in Britain highlights the link between the growth of evangelism and the growth of theological libraries, as an enabling force for the transmission of religious texts (Jesson 2006). However, the libraries of Scotland's

evangelical organisations are less evident today than they were, and have required some detective work to discover.

One of the most interesting trails I have followed has been the story of the Grogan Library, the library of the Bible Training Institute, Glasgow (1986 *Guide*), later renamed International Christian College, Glasgow (1999 *Guide*). The Grogan Library had 25,000 items in 1999, including a large collection of nineteenth-century Scottish Church History material donated from the Mitchell Library, Glasgow. In 2015, the college was relaunched as Scottish School of Christian Mission (SSCM), and the Grogan Library numbered around 30,000 items (Downey 2015, 25). The SSCM closed in 2018 (Wikipedia 2024), when, according to Wikipedia, the SSCM donated the Grogan Library to Nazarene Theological College. However, while according to the Nazarene College library website, "Approximately 12,000 volumes from the Grogan Library at International Christian College were added to the collection" (Nazarene Theological College 2024), the residue of the collection remained in a church in the East End of Glasgow, where it was reviewed by other libraries. Library stock was taken by the Scottish Baptist College, who relocated it to their Paisley campus (McIntosh, pers. comm., Sept. 18, 2024).

Rutherford House, Edinburgh was opened in Spring 1983 by the Scottish Evangelical Research Trust with a library of 6,000 volumes, which by the 1986 Guide had increased to 10,000 volumes. However, by the 2000s, the library was "not being used as well as had been hoped" (Rutherford Centre for Reformed Theology 2024) and usage of Rutherford House was generally low. Following a period of rethinking, Rutherford House moved with its library to the Highland Theological College in Dingwall, with 11,500 books and 1,800 pamphlets forming the Rutherford House special collection in the Highland Theological Institute Library (Cryle and Stirling 2023, 17).

The 1986 and 1999 *Guides* record details of several other small evangelical libraries, including the Faith Mission Bible College Library (also known as the Govan Stewart Memorial Library), which in 2024 was still thriving with over 20,000 volumes (Faith Mission Bible College 2020). Edinburgh Bible College Library features in the 1999 guide, but in 2024, details of its library are less visible on its website and it is e-learning materials that appear to support its current activities. The National Bible Society of Scotland Library, listed in the 1986 and 1999 ABTAPL *Guides*, did not respond to my email enquiry. However, the Paterson Bible Collection came to New College Library from the National Bible Society of Scotland in 1991 (Wright and Badcock 1996, 193).

Changes in the Library Landscape

> *"Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask such questions."*
>
> – Eccles. 7:10 (New Revised Standard Version)

When reflecting on past libraries, ABTAPL's *Guides* enable us to remember and recognise their contribution. But to be able to navigate the future, we need to investigate what has happened without being influenced by nostalgia for the libraries that have been. Extracting data based on the ABTAPL *Guides* can provide an overview of the changes, and the library stories gathered provide vital detail on how today's theological library landscape has arisen.

Counting Theological Libraries

When seeking to form an overview of theological libraries in Scotland 1959–2024, I've been guided in my approach by a brief study by Anna James (2016, 6–8) exploring the fates of smaller UK libraries in the 1986 ABTAPL guide, and by Ward de Pril's (2023) analysis of changes to ecclesiastical libraries in Flanders. Both studies divide libraries into broad categories that they acknowledge to be slightly arbitrary, and I have done the same.

I divided the Scottish libraries listed in the ABTAPL surveys into five broad types. These were:

- **Denominational**: Libraries wholly supported and managed by a denomination or religious organisation. Organisation may offer degrees validated by a University (e.g., Edinburgh Theological Seminary).
- **Independent**: Libraries existing as an independent charity or trust (e.g., Leighton Library).
- **National**: Library funded by the central government, collecting on behalf of the nation (e.g., National Library of Scotland).
- **Public**: Library serving the local area and funded by city or regional council (e.g., Edinburgh City Library).
- **University**: Theological libraries or library collections forming part of a larger university library, whether in a separate site or integrated into an overall collection (e.g., Glasgow University Library).

I identified the numbers in each category for the surveys in 1959, 1986 and 1999. Then, I created a combined list of all of the libraries named in the 3 surveys, which after eliminating name variations, came to a total of 49 libraries. Finally I identified which of these 49 libraries were still operational as individual working libraries.

Table 1: Scottish Libraries identified in ABTAPL surveys by type

	1959	1986	1999
Denominational	5	14	15
Independent	0	4	1
National	2	1	1
Public	0	3	4
University	7	11	9
Totals	14	33	30

Table 2: Operational status of Scottish Libraries named in ABTAPL surveys 1959–1999 in 2024

	OPERATIONAL – 2024*	NON-OPERATIONAL – 2024*
Denominational	7	20
Independent	4	0
National	1	0
Public	3	1
University	11	2
Totals	26	23

*From a combined total of 49 libraries across all time periods

Tables 1 and 2 show that denominational libraries formed the largest category of libraries identified in the *Guides*, with 27 out of the total of 49 libraries in this category. Table 3 shows that 20 out of the 27 denominational libraries are no longer operational. The small theological library supported by a denomination is no longer the dominant

Table 3: What happened to the non-operational libraries?*

	ADDED TO UNIVERSITY OR NATIONAL LIBRARY	MERGED / MOVED	SOLD / DISPERSED	IN STORAGE / NOT CURRENTLY ACCESSIBLE	UNTRACED / NO RESPONSE
Denominational	9	9	4	1	1
Independent	0	0	0	0	0
Public	1	0	0	0	0
National	0	0	0	0	0
University	2		0	0	0

*Some libraries met multiple fates so appear in more than one column

Note that the libraries in each category changed between periods. For example, 8 denominational libraries appear in both the 1986 and 1999 *Guides*, but the remainder of the list differ.

form of theological library in Scotland. We can see from Table 3 that the most common fates of Scottish denominational libraries are to be transferred into a university or national library, or to be merged and moved into another denominational library.

Whatever Happened to Denominational Libraries?

In 1959, New College librarian Rev. Lamb was writing at a transitional moment in the history of New College Library. Within a few years, the University of Edinburgh would take on the management of New College Library, and when in 1965 Rev. Lamb retired, he would be the last church minister to be the New College librarian. (While the employment of professional library staff is a positive development, it is also indicative of organisational change.) These are two typical changes in denominational libraries in this period – others include when a church gives up a library building (e.g., Trinity College, Glasgow), ownership of collections (e.g., St Andrews College of Education) and finally when a Church "outsources" library support, whether physical library support (Scottish Baptist College at UWS) or digital library support (Scottish Episcopalian Institute).

When closing, denominational libraries often safeguard historic collections first, relocating treasured and rare items to suitable homes early on. With modern collections, in many cases a new home is found

which is in sympathy with the aims of the old. However, the transfer of collections between two institutions with similar interests make it inevitable that there will be duplicates, which will be shed and only the unique and the prioritised retained. The remainder of the collection may pass out of knowledge. The journeys of the CSWC Library and the Grogan Library are illustrations of the complex paths library collections can follow.

Why do library closures happen? We only need to look at the images on a college or university website to see library power in action when it comes to advertising courses and institutions. Print books amassed on the shelves are a powerful cultural icon of spiritual and cultural authority, visual evidence of the intellectual pedigree of their institution. What changes, then, have caused organisations to relinquish their library power and decide to shed or amalgamate their libraries in the last seventy years? Understanding the exact changes which have shaped the course of each theological library would require detailed research, which is out of scope for this chapter. However, it is possible to trace changes in the visible ecosystem of theological and religious libraries.

Changing Nation, Changing Church

Against a background image of New College, Edinburgh, the BBC reported in May 2024 that Scotland's 2022 Census data showed for the first time that Scotland had a predominantly secular population. "No religion" was the most common survey response – 51.1% – up from 36.7% in 2011 (Cook 2024). This contrasts with the England and Wales Census of 2021, in which "Christian" remained the most common response to the religion question, with 46.2% (27.5 million people) describing themselves as Christian (Roskams 2022). Much had changed in just the last twenty years. Back in the 2001 Scottish Census, just under two thirds of Scots had identified as Christian and 43.4 % with the Church of Scotland (Bruce 2014, 2). Now in 2024, the Church of Scotland percentage of believers was 20.4% (Cook 2024).

This seismic shift to a secular culture is echoed elsewhere – for instance, in data about church membership and ministry. In 1960, the Church of Scotland had 1,301,280 members, 2,093 churches and 2,333 ministers. In 2020, the Church of Scotland had 309,660 members, 1,348 churches and 691 ministers (Brierley 2020). And the Church of Scotland is far from alone in struggling with falling membership,

falling numbers in the ministry and falling vocations. When Scotus College finally closed its doors as the last Catholic seminary in Scotland in 2009, the *Tablet* reported sadly that "There are nine students now in training at Scotus, compared to around 100 in the 1980s" (Farmer 2009, 52).

Falling congregation numbers have a direct correlation with falling church incomes and available funding for church libraries. However, the drop in candidates for ministry has more profound effects on libraries built for Scottish theological education. We've seen that the library of Scotus College was sent overseas once its seminarians departed. Most recently, the Church of Scotland has been considering significant changes to its theological education. The 2024 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland saw a proposal to replace the traditional BD degree with a 2-year apprenticeship leading to an academic diploma award (Church of Scotland General Assembly 2024b). This proposal was not passed. Instead, a "degree apprenticeship" route to a 3 year BD degree was agreed, with a new 2 year fast track route for those with suitable prior qualifications or experience (Church of Scotland General Assembly 2024a). At the time of writing, bids have been invited for training providers to deliver this ministry education route, with the aim of reducing the five current ministry training providers in Scotland to one. What impact this will have on university theological libraries in Scotland is yet to be seen.

Changing Higher Education

In July 1999, the new Scottish Members of Parliament processed in, past the entrance to New College Library, as the first Scottish Parliament for nearly 300 years met at the Assembly Halls on the Mound, Edinburgh. This was significant for Scottish higher education, and for libraries, because education was devolved to the Scottish Parliament. It meant that, although in 2012 tuition fees were introduced in UK higher education, Scottish-domiciled students currently do not pay tuition fees at universities in Scotland. The impact of this difference can be seen in the 2019 British Academy Report on Theology and Religious Studies Provision in UK Higher Education. This notes a significant decline in the number of higher education students in Theology and Religious Studies courses since 2012. In contrast, the enrollment of Scottish-domiciled students onto Theology and Religious Studies first

degrees remained relatively stable between 2012/13 and 2016/17 (British Academy et al. 2019, 11).

For research in Theology and Religious Studies, Scottish universities continue to have a strong presence within the discipline. The University of Edinburgh ranked 5th in the UK for Theology and Religious Studies in the most recent Research Excellence Framework exercise (UKRI 2023) and was joined in this exercise by University of Aberdeen, The Open University and University of St Andrews. In the most recent 2025 QS World Rankings, the Universities of Edinburgh, St Andrews and Aberdeen feature in the top 50 (QS 2025). Theological collections in Scottish university libraries are the powerhouses enabling this world class research and teaching.

Anna James noted recently that "general changes within English Higher Education have had a deleterious effect on theological collections within university libraries" (2022, 23). Yet in Scotland, the data shows that enrolments for theological and religious studies courses have not necessarily reduced, and theological and religious studies research is thriving. Furthermore, this chapter has shown that the number of theological collections within Scottish university libraries has increased in recent years through transfers and amalgamation. It seems that strong historical partnerships between churches and universities, and devolved Scottish education policy, may have provided a measure of insulation to theological libraries in Scotland from the cold winds of change blowing in UK higher education as a whole.

Going Digital

The 1986 ABTAPL *Guide* was published at the same time as New College Library began cataloguing online. Entries in the 1999 ABTAPL *Guide* indicate just how far theological libraries had advanced with their online catalogues. This was the first wave of digital transformation, providing digital discovery for library print collections. The second wave came in the 1990s with the introduction of digital content alongside print, the development of electronic journals, and digitisation providing digital surrogates of rare and fragile materials. E-books came later, at the end of the 1990s, paving the way for the third wave of digital transformation – digital content instead of print. After a period of e-book experimentation, Scottish universities came together in 2009 to form the Scottish Higher Education Digital Library (SHEDL), which continues to work with publishers to manage joint procurement of

e-books (Walker 2021, 129). Smaller libraries were also able to benefit from collaborative e-book acquisitions, for instance by the Scottish Episcopal Institute, which provided e-books via the Common Awards Hub partnership (Scottish Episcopal Institute 2022). All of this came even before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, which plunged libraries and their users into the digital world. The University of Edinburgh had been operating an e-preference model for some time, but during the Covid pandemic all essential reading was now required to be available online, and this has remained the case going forward. For smaller institutions, the profound shock of Covid hastened moves towards e-book use that had already begun due to pedagogical changes enabling distance learning and reductions in the residential learning experience. For instance, it was during Covid that the Scottish Baptist College joined the Scottish Episcopal Institute in providing a digital library for its students, and it has not looked back.

Going digital has changed the nature of Scottish theological libraries and their librarians. A similar survey to the ABTAPL *Guides* today would find it challenging to come up with collection numbers as they did in 1986 and 1999. In university libraries, e-books are often purchased as part of large interdisciplinary collections, rather than title-by-title purchase. E-books may be "rented" on a subscription or an evidence based model rather than owned. And for the library user, understanding the size and nature of digital collections is something of an act of faith, when the books are not visible on the library shelves. Librarians of the past were intermediaries for their print collections by fetching items from closed stacks. Librarians today are a different kind of intermediary, aiming to make digital collections visible through online reading lists, guides and information literacy training.

Theological Libraries in Scotland Today

> *"Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."*
> – John 12:24 (New Revised Standard Version)

This chapter began by remembering that, in 1843, a fledgling church considered it to be most urgent to establish a new theological library. Today, church priorities have changed as their congregations have changed. Scottish churches have both embraced the agility of digital library collections delivery and developed existing and new

partnerships between denominations and universities to secure homes for their theological library collections. The last seventy years have seen the movement of major Scottish church libraries – New College Library, Trinity College Glasgow, Scottish Baptist College Library – into university hands. There have been new partnerships and strategies for managing the Catholic heritage of libraries and archives, including a notable collaboration with Aberdeen University. Two of Scotland's newer universities, Stirling and Dundee, have reached out to the religious past by adopting historic theological library collections. New theological libraries have arisen – notably Highland Theological College and Pluscarden Abbey in the north of Scotland – and are building for the future. It's clear that theological libraries and archives in all sectors continue to work to preserve Scotland's religious cultural and intellectual heritage for posterity. And this significant movement and integration of theological collections into university and national libraries, as well as the expansion of university library collections for religious studies and world Christianity, has enriched the library resources for research and scholarship in theology and religious studies.

However, one of the traditional purposes of ABTAPL member libraries, ministry and evangelism training, has been profoundly affected by societal shifts to the secular, especially declining ministry vocations. The migration of Catholic ministry training out of Scotland in 2009 is one example of the crises that have caused denominational libraries to close, to shift responsibility for their print collections to other organisations, or to move into e-learning provision. Most Scottish print theological library collections now sit within secular organisations, serving a predominantly secular society. These collections are shaped and supported by societal and political circumstances which are unique to Scotland.

Amalgamation of collections and closure of small denominational libraries have been the context of the significant reduction in the number of theological libraries in Scotland in the last seventy years. Twenty-three libraries that were listed in the ABTAPL *Guides* are no longer. This chapter has aimed to remember them and recognise the work of the librarians who built them. But the unique collections that these libraries once held have largely been preserved, within other denominational libraries, within university libraries and within the National Library of Scotland. They are continuing to bear scholarly fruit and to support the religious landscape of Scotland.

What Can ABTAPL Do for Theological Libraries in Scotland?

> *"...it shone like aurora midnight mass*
> *it shone like a plainchant surge...*
> *it shone like the story of you and me..."*
> – Alasdair Paterson "On the library" (Paterson 2010)

At the time of writing, ABTAPL has six institutional members in Scotland. Three of them, Highland Theological College, Edinburgh Theological Seminary and Innerpeffray Library, could be described as small theological libraries, and there are other small active theological libraries detailed in this chapter, such as Faith Mission Bible College Library and Edinburgh Bible College Library. All of ABTAPL's services for small theological libraries continue to be important to support these libraries.

The other three current ABTAPL members are the Universities of Edinburgh (New College Library), St Andrews University and Glasgow University, all large university libraries. ABTAPL's services for small theological libraries may not be needed here. However, ABTAPL has a role to play with its unique strengths as a subject network, able to provide Theology and Religious Studies-based continuing professional development to library staff for whom this subject area will be one responsibility among many. To do this, it must build on its existing links with large organisations and proactively cultivate new ones, even if their structures and staffing do not identify the theological library or librarian as a distinct entity. Crucially, to engage with ABTAPL, these large-scale libraries must be able to discover what ABTAPL is doing via digital platforms and networks that reach the whole higher education and wider library community. Also, in response to the importance of religious studies and cultural studies in the curriculum today, ABTAPL should explore opportunities to partner with other library groups (e.g., MELCOM Middle Eastern Studies librarians, SCOLMA African Studies librarians or EASL Sinological librarians) to offer interdisciplinary networking and development opportunities.

There is an obvious point that this study has identified twenty-six currently operational libraries in Scotland that were listed in the ABTAPL *Guides* as having theological collections. Only six of that twenty-six are presently ABTAPL members and ABTAPL is weaker without the remaining twenty libraries. ABTAPL could benefit from taking time to survey these non-members to identify the elements of

its membership offer that would appeal to them, and to proactively communicate with them.

In the last seventy years, Scottish theological libraries have gone digital in a myriad of ways and libraries for ministry education are increasingly being developed as digital and distance learning provision. ABTAPL needs to reach out to the people who are supporting and developing digital library provision for theological education, including e-learning officers or administrators who may never have had any responsibility for traditional print library collections. The language and images used in ABTAPL communications should include and highlight digital resource provision as well as shelves of printed books, to indicate that ABTAPL has gone digital too.

ABTAPL publications support the important work of telling the stories of theological libraries to articulate their value and to record their contribution. With a few notable exceptions, libraries rarely surface in published histories of religious organisations and churches, except for occasional glimpses when valuable collections are acquired or a building project for more library space is needed. This means that the ABTAPL *Guides* continue to be invaluable resources in preserving details of Scottish theological libraries, including the libraries that have now significantly changed or no longer exist. Increasing the digital reach of these publications via open access publishing and indexing via Atla, the key publisher in this area, would benefit researchers and bring the work ABTAPL has done to the eyes of a wider world.

In this chapter, the Karma Kagyu Samye-Ling Tibetan Centre Library was the only non-Christian library to be featured. The choice to base this study on the ABTAPL *Guides* meant that some newer libraries that were created after 1999, such as the Scottish Jewish Archives in Glasgow, were excluded. ABTAPL is, and has always aimed to be, an inclusive organisation, but in order to reflect the religious diversity of Scotland there is more work to be done to discover, build and strengthen links with libraries and librarians of faiths and beliefs other than Christianity.

Finally, we have seen how theological libraries in Scotland have faced and are facing profound changes. ABTAPL is a source of vital experience and support for libraries facing these challenges. ABTAPL also has a role to play in supporting research and enquiry into the impact of theological collections, and supporting advocacy for theological libraries undergoing changes. With support from ABTAPL, librarians working with theological collections in Scotland can stand up and be counted in a secular world.

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Notes

1　For a short introduction to Scottish church history, see Church of Scotland. "History." Accessed March 18, 2025. *https://www. churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-faith/history*.

Buddhist Libraries in the UK

CARLOS GARCIA-JANE

*L*ibraries in Buddhist temples, monasteries, and meditation centres play a major role in preserving, promoting, and disseminating Buddhist teachings and practices. In the UK, Buddhist libraries have developed exponentially after the end of the Second World War, a period almost concomitant with the existence of ABTAPL. Buddhist libraries function as repositories of sacred books, scholarly treatises, and practical works. Such texts can enhance the knowledge and support the practice of monastics, practitioners, scholars, and devotees. For spiritual seekers, Buddhist sympathisers, and the public, Buddhist libraries provide resources on Buddhism as a religion, philosophy, or way of life. Buddhist libraries symbolize the lineage and tradition of their parent institution. Alongside publishing, websites, social media, and newsletters, Buddhist libraries represent a central effort to collect and disseminate Buddhist thought and experience, an important element in the visibility of Buddhism in the British religious

landscape and a key phenomenon in the transplantation, adaptation, transmission, and development of Buddhism in the UK.

This chapter surveys the presence of libraries across all Buddhist denominations in the UK. It focuses on their creation and collections as well as on their role within their parent organization. By tackling libraries in Buddhist settings, rather than in research, specialist, or higher education academic environments, this chapter offers a contrast to other essays in this volume. Although all Buddhist libraries provide access to resources, only a few aspire to develop information literacy, support research and study, enhance academic performance, or foster a learning community.

The term *theological library* might not adequately apply to the cases explored here. These libraries vary greatly in size, collecting efforts, professional support, and intended uses. Moreover, it is debated whether traditional theistic theology aligns with Buddhism – a religion (for some a philosophy or spiritual practice) often described as non-theistic. However, *theology* and *theological* aptly apply to these cases in at least two senses. First, Carisse Mickey Berryhill's (2020) definition of theological libraries appropriately applies to these types of libraries. They collect texts each tradition views as valued, sacred, or symbolically central. They serve a particular community of practitioners, followers, and religious specialists in their own practice and goals by providing resources and tools for religious education and edification. And they appeal to the wider community and potentially to researchers. Second, it can be said that when scholars and practitioners critically and constructively reflect on the Buddhist tradition and the nature and purpose of practice, that constitutes Buddhist theology (Jackson and Makransky 2000). Hence, not only the thinking about these libraries, but also the reflection and research facilitated by these collections constitutes Buddhist theology in that they aim to have an impact on the life of practitioners and on society at large.

This chapter argues that Buddhist libraries represent a key phenomenon in the transmission, adoption, and adaptation of Buddhism in the UK. It suggests that Buddhist libraries in the UK reflect diverse views on librarianship and knowledge transmission and organisation. It also shows how Buddhist libraries are formed in response to Buddhist and European attitudes towards books, reading, and learning within religious practice. This chapter introduces librarians and historians to an important phenomenon for a small, yet growing number of people where book collections are not just information resources but also sites of religious practice and performance. For scholars and practitioners,

it is hoped that descriptions of these libraries will contribute to the knowledge of Buddhism in the UK. And for Buddhist libraries and librarians, it is hoped this chapter will offer an opportunity to reflect on the role of libraries in Buddhist life in the UK and an invitation for Buddhist libraries to collaborate and learn together.

As Alan Jesson has noted, "there has been a growth of non-Christian theological libraries" in recent times (2006, 480). This growth has not been duly accounted for and documented. This chapter diversifies our knowledge of theological and religious libraries. A revised version of my previous survey (Garcia-Jane 2015), complemented by ideas on the reading practices of contemporary Buddhists (Garcia-Jane 2021), this original contribution constitutes the only study dedicated to this phenomenon (Ćurić 2020, 75; Milošević 2023, 13–14). Concerned with the phenomenon of transplantation and adaptation of Buddhism to the West, scholarship on Buddhism in the UK has focused on the practices of convert-dominated groups and lineages, whilst largely, but not totally, neglecting those of the majority of Buddhists in the UK. Although accounting for a phenomenon found largely in convert-dominated Buddhist settings, this chapter acknowledges the great tradition and immense value of Buddhist libraries found all around Asia.

Buddhist Practitioners in the UK

Buddhism is a growing tradition in the UK. Based on census data, the estimated number of self-identified Buddhists in the UK by 2021/2022 was under 300,000 people – about 0.4% of the total UK population – comprising both Asian communities and Western converts. Most Buddhist practitioners are Asian/Chinese, with over 30% of total practitioners being White or White Other, and just over 10% being mixed, Black, or from other backgrounds. By total population, most Buddhists reside in England, then Scotland, and followed by Wales, with the least being in Northern Ireland (Office for National Statistics 2022; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2023; Scotland's Census 2022).

A distinction can be made here between Buddhism as practised by converts (not necessarily White, British, or Western, but the majority in this group are) and as practised by diasporic – also variously referred to as ethnic – communities (Starkey and Tomalin 2016). Diasporic communities (Sri Lankan, Chinese, Vietnamese, Burmese, and Korean, amongst others) practise a Buddhism comprising, but not limited to, devotional chanting, ancestor worship, or cultural festivals, and the

use of local languages, which converted, or "Westernised," Buddhists might not engage in as much. Although the use of monasteries and centres is not absolute, in practice many Buddhist centres cater for either of the broad divisions of Western and convert practitioners or diasporic communities. Their practices and needs influence how they collect library materials or even how they mediate with these resources for their communal or individual practices. It is felt that more research on the textual practices of both sets of practitioners would enrich the scholarly account of Buddhist practice in the UK.

Additionally, Buddhist practitioners, as well as practitioners of Buddhism broadly understood, might not have identified as Buddhist in the census but remain what has been referred to as Buddhist sympathisers, nightstand Buddhists, or simply as spiritual seekers (Tweed 2002). Belonging to other faiths or none, these individuals might have adopted some Buddhist practices. Some might not consider Buddhism a religion, but a philosophy or way of life. Moreover, these individuals might not access libraries to meet their needs. What is significant however is the large number of Buddhist libraries and the ubiquitous presence of Buddhist-related resources available in relation to the relatively small number of self-identified Buddhists. This reflects the symbolic value placed on library collections as well as their function in promoting Buddhist thought and practice.

Although libraries are present in all contexts, there is a stronger drive to collect library material in Western Buddhist-dominated contexts, in ecumenical groups, in traditions focused on practising a Buddhism suitable for current times and to enact societal change, and in groups geared towards convert Buddhists. However, there is also evidence that diasporic communities collect library material in their own language, one example being the collection at London Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple comprising about 3,000 volumes, periodicals, and other material mainly in Chinese (London Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple 2024). Distinguishing between Western and diasporic Buddhism also proves helpful to understand the use and ownership of buildings and the presence of libraries. With some exceptions, whereas Western, convert communities purchase and repurpose buildings in city centres or country houses and listed buildings for their meditation centres and monasteries, diasporic communities, with less economic opportunity, often purchase semi-detached houses in suburban neighbourhoods with the primary aim to attract members of their own communities (Starkey and Tomalin 2016). Since these houses often accommodate monastics, there is less space for libraries.

Reading in Buddhist Practice

Buddhist libraries are found in places of practice and instruction. Reading for information, edification, and enjoyment, but also religious reading – performed to learn a certain account of reality (Griffiths 1999, 40) – are central to their ethos. Reading is mainly considered a companion to practice, on occasion the actual practice. Buddhist attitudes towards reading and access to reading material varies from the widely diverse, to the narrowly restrictive and focused, to the closely monitored and controlled. These attitudes are formed by a combination of Buddhist views on learning and practice as well as by Western and contemporary perspectives on religious practice and study.

Reading is attested at all stages and levels of practice in contemporary Buddhism. A convert's first experience of Buddhism might have been through reading Buddhist-related literature. For some, this might have been their introduction to Buddhist practice, even their main form of contact with the religion. For most, reading remains an important element in their practice and identity as Buddhists. For ordinands and monastics, or for anyone with a committed practice, religious reading might be both a means to learn a particular worldview and a prompt for reflection and inspiration.

Having developed unique forms of textual engagement and reading practices, Buddhism has depended on texts for its expansion and revival throughout its history. The creation, development, scope, and mission of libraries in Buddhist settings is a product of historical trends as well as views for the future. In the UK, the reading habits of contemporary Buddhists can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when significant historical and social changes occurred. At that time, due to the contact with Christian missionaries and Western authors researching and popularising Buddhism, some Buddhist publications emerged which emulated their Christian counterparts. Found in places like Sri Lanka or Japan, these publications were also animated by revivalist and reformist Buddhist movements characterised by scripturalism, rationalism, individualism, and universalism – traits consonant with what would become the Westernising influences of Buddhist modernism. Important for this study is the fact that since then, a greater emphasis was placed on reading as a preferred method for the transmission of knowledge and for engaging with authoritative texts. Moreover, it also meant that Buddhism was principally introduced and transmitted to the West initially as a textual tradition – not

so much as a meditative or devotional tradition – so that texts had to be arranged into libraries, one of the greatest symbols of learning, knowledge, and the Enlightenment. Aimed at captivating Western audiences, the tenor of these texts betrayed European, particularly Protestant, themes and preoccupations, such as the need for rational, scientific explanations. Buddhist scholars refer to this phenomenon as Protestant Buddhism – a hybrid tradition drawing from European Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Transcendentalism, amongst other movements and historical trends (Mellor 1991). These processes and texts also had an impact in Asia. The Buddhism of these texts makes little reference to myth, ritual, or devotion, and instead contains psychological terminology. This process continued later in the twentieth century with the alignment of Buddhism in the West with several psychologies and therapies which emphasised science, individualism, and self-development.

Besides other media, modern Buddhists favour written texts and solitary, silent reading. Perhaps due to Western, democratic forms of access to education, Western dharma practitioners and Buddhist sympathisers feel freer to select their own readings. These individuals are generally defined as self-conscious, well off, well educated, middle class, liberal and respectful of diversity, less committed to organised religions, and more inclined to exploring spirituality through meditation and reading. Given these forms of commodified religion, there is a sense in which the visibility of Buddhism in the British religious landscape is dominated by Western Buddhists.

A phenomenon parallel to the development of libraries in Buddhist settings and key for understanding contemporary Buddhist reading habits is the expansion of the reading public in the twentieth century with the increase in literacy rates, the availability of cheaper books, the inclusion of Buddhist-related topics in publishing houses' catalogues, and the establishment of publishing houses run by Buddhist organisations. For instance, Windhorse Publications is a Buddhist charitable publishing company established in the 1970s to publish works by Sangharakshita and books and other media by Triratna (Windhorse Publications, n.d.). Likewise, Tharpa Publications publishes works by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso and by members of the New Kadampa Tradition (Tharpa 2025). Other publishing companies include Parallax Press for content related to Thich Nhat Hanh, his students, and the Community of Mindful Living (Parallax Press, n.d.) or Buddha's Light Publishing connected to Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Publications 2025).

Buddhist Librarianship and Sources

Scholars have studied book collecting and libraries in Buddhist settings in Asia and elsewhere, from early Buddhism to contemporary times. However, as Steven Collins (1990, 104) notices, more must be done to study this phenomenon, particularly in Asia, but also in those places where Buddhism is found. Technical literature often overlooks libraries in Buddhist settings. Guides to places of worship contain references to book collections and libraries amongst the activities of Buddhist groups (Weller 2007), some noticing over sixty such centres (Corner and Marchant 2007). One authoritative source lists one hundred and eighty-nine Buddhist buildings in England alone (Historic England 2017), all of which with a potential for housing a book collection. Only one Buddhist library is currently listed in the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL) directory. ABTAPL, however, has always been an ecumenical and interfaith organisation with an interest in Buddhist libraries (ABTAPL, n.d.).

There are perhaps more than a hundred Buddhist libraries in the UK. This number is likely higher, considering that the UK's largest groups by number of centres (New Kadampa Tradition and Triratna) have collections in practically all their centres. This number is arrived at by direct knowledge and by mentions found in primary sources (histories of lineages, biographies, newsletters, websites, directories) and secondary literature (historical, sociological, and ethnographical studies).

Regarding their organization and management, a few publications have addressed the peculiarities of Buddhist libraries. Perhaps based on the tradition of church libraries in the United States and given the availability and demand for books on Buddhism, the Buddhist Churches of America published a library manual written by Roy H. Fry in 1961 (Arai 1980, 1), followed by Tomoe M. Arai's manual (1980), both largely aimed at paraprofessionals. Classifying Buddhist material has also been the topic of recent publications (Ranasinghe 1991; Library of Luminary Buddhist Institute 2011).

History of Buddhist Libraries

In the UK, collections of Buddhist-related material developed alongside research into the history, archaeology, religion, and literature of Asia, from the late eighteenth century and particularly in the nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries. With the growth of academic interest in Buddhism, Western orientalist scholars made accessible Buddhist texts and ideas. These eventually became the libraries of learned societies and university libraries. Around the First World War, now with an impetus for religious practice and personal development, such collections as the Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society, later The Buddhist Society, started forming alongside incipient efforts to establish monastic communities, like the Sri Lankan London Buddhist Vihara in the 1920s. Up to that moment, the intellectual interest was on Pāli texts and the Theravāda tradition. Seminal to this was the creation of the Pali Text Society in 1881 by T.W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) "to foster and promote the study of Pali texts" (Pali Text Society 2023).

Although other groups formed in the first half of the twentieth century due to the presence in the UK of Asian and Western teachers, the creation of Buddhist establishments, and therefore libraries, grew exponentially after the Second World War. The annexation of Tibet by the People's Republic of China, the subsequent diaspora of the Tibetan people, and immigration from former British colonies and other diaspora communities brought in new Buddhist traditions to the British religious landscape – Zen, Pure Land, and Tibetan Buddhism. Animated by new religious movements and alternative spiritualities in the 1970s and 1980s, alongside the creation of sections and departments on Buddhist Studies and south, southeast, east Asian area studies in many UK universities, many Buddhist library collections were formed and developed then, and have continued to do so since.

Geography of Buddhist Libraries

Found across all Buddhist denominations present in the UK, there is a higher concentration of Buddhist libraries in urban centres and in locations with monastic presence and regular, permanent congregations, as well as in lineages and groups running publishing houses and study programmes, thus reflecting their ethos around reading and study but also around outreach and conversion.

Libraries, of course, are housed in buildings. Although Buddhist groups have been established in new buildings, one of the salient characteristics of Buddhism in the UK has been the adaptation of existing structures for the purposes of Buddhist practice. Buddhist libraries partly occupy buildings which once were courthouses, schools, libraries, seminaries, mansions, churches, or fire stations. There are also

some Asian-style buildings across the spectrum. Building projects are supported by volunteer donations and fundraising efforts, both locally and from overseas (Historic England 2017).

Characteristics of Buddhist Libraries

Buddhist libraries collect and make available Buddhist-related books, periodicals, audiovisual material, archival material, and artworks. Alongside physical collections, many institutional websites or libraries' webpages contain collections of digital resources comprising e-books, audiobooks, audio and video recordings, newsletters, reading lists, and similar material. These are supplemented by material available for sale or for free distribution. Their main users are practitioners and visitors, with a few collections also serving scholars and researchers.

Buddhist libraries are symbols and embodiments of their lineages and traditions. As Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche (b. 1951) put it, "A Buddhist library for dharma texts is the precious treasury of wisdom, and that's an invaluable treasure; it's more valuable than any kind of material treasure" (Gomde UK, n.d.). Libraries act as curators, custodians, museums, and repositories symbolically narrating and iconically embodying the histories of the lineages and individuals they represent. These functions reflect traditional textual practices, which are part of Buddhist monastic and lay devotional life: memorising, copying, collecting, reciting, and sharing Buddhist texts. These highly meritorious activities are essential not only to the practice of Buddhism, but also to its transmission and preservation.

Manifested nowadays in the sponsoring of translation and publishing projects or in supporting Buddhist libraries, Buddhist textual practices are grounded in Buddhist ideas of *dāna* or giving and in the merit accrued by generous acts. The Buddhist teaching or *dharma*, manifested in books, is one of the three jewels of Buddhism – Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; teacher, teaching, and students. Giving in general but the dharma in particular is considered a most meritorious devotional act: the gift of *dharma* is the highest gift. Or as the beloved and revered *Dhammapada* has it, "The gift of the dharma conquers all gifts" (Roebuck 2010, 69). The value placed on books intrinsically reflects the role reading might play in the practice of Buddhism.

Physical and digital resources represent the tangible efforts to collect, promote, and disseminate the intellectual, doctrinal, and pastoral output of each tradition. Besides practice, Buddhist groups also

value an intellectual understanding of the religion and believe that reading and studying might impact the life of Buddhist practitioners and sympathisers.

The symbolic and iconic value placed on books reflects how these libraries define the scope of their collections. Whereas many groups emphasise the teaching of their tradition, lineage, and founder via their libraries, websites, and publishing houses, they also tend to offer a comprehensive, on a few occasions exhaustive, account of Buddhist history, practice, and doctrine, including canonical and scriptural texts, commentaries, scholarly literature, general introductions, and even popular titles by well-known figures such as the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, or Pema Chödrön, amongst others. Philosophy, psychology, and ethics are popular topics, with meditation manuals being frequently consulted. Besides these, material on psychotherapy, art, cookery, gardening, or poetry are often found in these collections. Although some libraries do not classify their material at all, most libraries classify by subject, often using some decimal classification system. As a reflection on their collecting efforts, Buddhist libraries and the institutions to which they belong imagine practitioners' needs ranging from the general and eclectic to the researcher and academic to the sectarian and exclusionary.

Collecting bias can become restrictive and exclusivist in scope, even leading to collections being dismantled. For instance, the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) purged the collections of the Manjushri Institute, subsequently presumably in all centres, of all books except for titles by their founder Ven Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche (1931–2022) and for their in-house publications. Their main collection, once comprising over 3,000 volumes, has now become a collection of just over a hundred volumes. This purge was accompanied by an institutional decision to remove all iconography not directly related to NKT teachings from their centres and to only allow teachers from within the NKT to teach at their centres (Kay 2004, 76). That core collection, and a selection of related works, is available in the shrine rooms and bookshops of every NKT centre worldwide (Manuel Rivero-De'Martine, personal communication, March 18, 2025). This symbolic potency of books and the iconic valence they contain is made evident in the case of books by Geshe Kelsang and how they are made to stand for the presence of the now absent teacher. As Geshe Kelsang expressed it, "Dharma books are the eyes through which sentient beings can see the spiritual paths to liberation and enlightenment, the light by which they can dispel the

darkness of ignorance, and the Spiritual Guide from whom they can receive reliable advice" (Tharpa 2025).

In contrast, whereas the Zen tradition places great emphasis on direct experience and displays distrust on the mediation of books for actual experience, some Zen settings, such as Shobo-an and Throssel Hole (Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, n.d.) have libraries. These and similar libraries cater primarily for monastics and regular practitioners and place their needs to the forefront. Nonetheless, some Zen lineage websites feature articles, e-books, and reading lists, often quite extensive, and akin to a contemporary canon of Zen literature (Crook 2004).

Library collections often appear alongside or shortly after the foundation of Buddhist groups. Resulting from the efforts of monastics or laypeople, their development is due to the donation or the purchase of individual items or the addition of whole collections. Usually managed by volunteer paraprofessionals, both lay and monastic, virtually all Buddhists, a few libraries are led by qualified librarians, although retired librarians and academics are often drawn to these roles.

According to size, collections range from the virtually insignificant (under two hundred books) to the substantial (between 2,000 and 10,000), to the remarkable (about 20,000–25,000 items). Libraries with a larger collection have dedicated library spaces and services. Some of these significant collections are described below. Growth is due to donations and purchases, managed very diversely across the spectrum. Some libraries also contribute to the development of digital collections. Collections are mostly housed in a single room, with larger collections spanning over several spaces. Most libraries also have special collections considered rare and valuable.

The predominant language in most collections is English. However, most libraries include material in Buddhist canonical languages (Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese) as well as in modern languages according to their needs, mainly European and Asian languages.

Some libraries do not catalogue their collections, but increasingly most do. Cataloguing is often a priority for organising a collection in developing libraries. Many libraries have made their catalogue available online, particularly those with larger collections. For those cataloguing their collections, many just create basic records in a spreadsheet or similar format, sometimes shared online, like the Triratna collection at Adhisthana (Adhisthana, n.d.) A few, however, use MARC21, AACR, or RDA or similar standards and formats. Electronic catalogues are the exception, but increasingly more common. Amongst the libraries mentioned in the case studies, many catalogues often use cost-effective,

easy-to-use software, like the 3,000-volume Paramita Library (2025) at Jamyang Buddhist Centre London (2024), the Samatha Trust Library (n.d.), or Centre for Applied Buddhism (2025) of the Soka Gakkai-UK (SGI-UK). A few libraries use open source, free software, such as Koha, like the Christmas Humphreys Memorial Library at Amaravati (Garcia-Jane 2015) and Gomde UK (2024). Popular elsewhere, a few groups in the UK opt for having their collection in social cataloguing web applications such as Librarything, like the almost 3,000-volume library at Golden Buddha Centre, Totnes (n.d.). The catalogue can also appear embedded in their websites, like at The Buddhist Society (2025a).

Canonical collections are highly esteemed and symbolically potent in all traditions and lineages. Containing the words of the Buddha, canonical works symbolise and embody the Buddha's speech or teaching – the Dharma. Amongst other textual categorisations, Buddhist canons are typically defined as the Pāli Canon (the Tipiṭaka or the Three Baskets) of the Theravāda tradition of South and Southeast Asia, the Chinese Canon (or the Great Storage of Scriptures) of the Mahāyāna traditions of East Asia, and the Tibetan Canon found across Tibetan cultural areas. The two latter canons include texts translated from Sanskrit and other Indian and Central Asian languages as well as Chinese or Tibetan originals. In addition, other canons of importance are the Mongolian Canon, in Classical Mongolian translated from the Tibetan, and the Nepalese Canon in Sanskrit.

Buddhist scholarship distinguishes between a closed canon (Pāli Canon) and an open, evolving canon to which new works may be added (associated with Mahāyāna traditions). Canonical collections, although partially or in full found in a section in many Buddhist libraries, are frequently found in other areas of a Buddhist temple or monastery as well, often in lecture rooms and around altars. Canonical collections therefore are reserved for ritual and performative practices. In the Theravāda context, scholarship refers to those sources used for edification and instruction as a practical canon. This practical canon is found in most library collections, with the "closed" Pāli canon often found in separate cabinets, on occasion still in their original wrapping, unused. In other contexts, such as the Tibetan, it is customary to arrange relevant sūtras and tantras, in larger temples also the commentaries, surrounding altars, also unused except for special occasions.

One such performative, ritual occasion is during the Tibetan festival of Saga Dawa (Tib. Sa ga zla ba) or Vesak – the month celebrating the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha. In preparation for this celebration, communal reading of the Kangyur section of the Tibetan

canon is organized. All volumes are taken from the shelves around the altar, the wrappings covering the volumes of texts are washed and ironed, and the texts are communally read. In this festival, the library constitutes the site of religious performance, and the books are the ritual objects, with reading and reciting representing key elements in the ritual.

Another ritual and performative function of books must also be noted. In Tibetan lineages, for instance, teaching transmission requires the presence of the teacher, the disciple, the oral transmission, and a copy of the text being transmitted for the transmission to be effective. Without the texts, these lineages would be discontinued. Hence, collecting and safeguarding these texts is of the utmost importance. Amongst these, West London-based Lelung Rinpoche (b. 1970) strives to collect original Tibetan manuscripts key to the transmission of the lineages he heads (Lelung Tulku 2013). Samye Ling founder Akong Rinpoche (1939–2013) had endeavoured to collect Tibetan Buddhist and medical manuscripts from India, Nepal, China, and Mongolia for study and safekeeping (Thubten and Trinley 2020). Likewise, Chime Rinpoche (b. 1941) is also reported to have collected valuable items. To varying extents, books and library collections have iconic and performative functions in all Buddhist traditions.

Anecdotally, there seems to be a certain affinity between librarianship and monasticism as some monastics take on the role of librarians or had been librarians before ordination, whilst those acting as librarians and volunteering in libraries certainly see themselves as practising dharma. For instance, ordained individuals within their lineages, such as Rev. Alexander (Throssel Hole Library) or Danasamudra (Adhisthana) had been librarians and served as such. The Burmese monk and Abhidharma scholar U Thittila had been a librarian at The Buddhist Society, as was Myokyo-Ni (Irmgard Schoegl), founder of the Zen Centre, London. Ani (Jetsunma) Tenzi Palmo (Diane Perry) catalogued the library collection of the London Buddhist Vihara in the early 1960s before her ordination – together with Russell Webb, once editor of the *British Mahabodhi Society Journal* and of the *Buddhist Studies Review*, who also worked at the School of Oriental and African Studies library. Chime Rinpoche was curator of Tibetan material at The British Library for sixteen years. Helen, a Mitra member at the Manchester Buddhist Centre, is a retired librarian. Lastly, Rev. Aloka, former monastic at Amaravati, had been a librarian in South Africa before ordination, and worked again as a librarian after disrobing.

Case Studies: Libraries and Individuals

To exemplify the diversity and peculiarities of libraries in Buddhist settings, the following libraries have been selected as case studies. Their description relies on secondary literature, websites, library catalogues, observations, existing survey data, and conversations with representatives from some of these traditions. They are located in England, Scotland, and Wales. Buddhist libraries in Northern Ireland, although in existence, are in developing stages. For instance, Jampa Ling Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre (Jampa Ling Northern Ireland; 2018), located in County Cavan, Republic of Ireland, caters for practitioners and visitors across the border and has a library.

The Buddhist Society Library

Founded as the Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society in 1924 by Christmas Humphreys, the Buddhist Society became an independent body in 1926, thus becoming one of the first and oldest Buddhist organizations outside of Asia. It moved to its current location near Victoria Station, London, in 1956. Truly ecumenical in approach, the Buddhist Society (2025b) offers lectures, classes, and courses in Theravāda, Pure Land, Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism.

Their first library accession records date from 1926. Aiming to support practice, the library holds 5,000 items on all aspects and traditions of Buddhist history, thought, and practice. Members can borrow library material; non-members can use the library for reference. Comprising books, periodicals, and audiovisual material, the catalogue is available online. A separate digital library is also maintained (Buddhist Society 2025c).

Christmas Humphreys (1901–1983) is a seminal figure in the development of Buddhism in the UK and of its libraries. Prominent for his work as a judge and for being the best-known Buddhist convert to Buddhism of his time, Humphreys corresponded with key twentieth-century spiritual authorities, such as Ananda Metteya, Annie Besant, D. T. Suzuki, or Alan Watts, amongst others. A prolific author of books on Buddhism, Humphreys was instrumental in the popularisation of Buddhism in the UK. A substantial library collection developed under his presidency at The Buddhist Society until his death. In 1984, Humphreys' home in St John's Wood, North West London, developed into the Shobo-an Zen Centre (2025), a Rinzai group originally led by

Ven. Myokyo-ni (1921–2007), whom Humphreys had met in the 1950s and who subsequently worked temporarily in the library of The Buddhist Society. The library at Shobo-an, restricted to residents and practitioners, comprises over 2,000 items and a few hundred electronic resources mainly in English and in a few European languages, Chinese, and Japanese. The collection at Amaravati, moreover, was first formed by a donation of books belonging to Humphreys.

London Buddhist Vihara Library

Founded by Anagarika Dharmapala in 1926, the London Buddhist Vihara (2025) became the first Sri Lankan monastery established outside Asia. Managed by the Colombo-based Anagarika Dharmapala Trust, the vihara moved several times until it found its current location on a Grade II listed building in Chiswick, West London, in 1994. It houses several monastics from Sri Lanka.

The library occupies the lecture hall. It comprises sets of the canon in English and Asian languages, some ola-leaf manuscripts, periodicals, and monographs on Buddhism and related topics in English and Sinhala. The library is open to monastics, students, and friends of the vihara. The growth of the collection is well documented. There was a library already in 1928 (Oliver 1979, 67); the library had 1,000 volumes by 1972 (Candamitto 1972), an "impressive" 2,000 by 1979 (Oliver 1979, 72–73), and 2,500 by 1994. It currently holds about 2,600 volumes. Until the advent of university departments on Asian religions and history in the 1970s, the Buddhist Vihara library was thought to be the most representative library on Buddhist topics in the UK (Webb 2004, 159–160).

Christmas Humphreys Memorial Library – Amaravati Buddhist Monastery

Amaravati (2025a) is a Theravāda Buddhist monastery in the Thai Forest Tradition of Ajahn Chah (1918–1992) established in 1984 by the English Sangha Trust in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. Monastics and postulants, together with support staff, form the resident community. The Christmas Humphreys Memorial Library (Amaravati 2025b), named after its original donor, founder in 1924 of the Buddhist Lodge, later The Buddhist Society, was created in 1985 by the then abbot

Ajahn Sumedho (b. 1934), with Barbara Jackson as librarian. There is also a private library for monks and another for nuns. It is currently run by Juan Serrano and Julian Wall, both volunteer paraprofessionals with long involvement in Buddhist librarianship. Wall had also been involved with the cataloguing of the London Buddhist Vihara. Additionally, a qualified librarian also supports the development of the archival collections.

Library services include lending, including postal service, and reference to residents and visitors. Besides library collections, it hosts archival and special collections. Of particular interest are the handwritten manuscripts, diaries, and rare volumes belonging to members of the early English sangha from the 1950s and 1960s, as well as a large photographic collection, currently being digitised and catalogued.

The collection has grown by donations. It currently houses about 25,000 items, including over 200 periodicals, the archives of Ven. Narada Thera and the collection of Buddhist scholars and Indologists such as that of Karel Verner (1925–2019), amongst others. Half of the collection is dedicated to Buddhist topics, a quarter to other religions, with an emphasis on Asian traditions, and the remaining to other psychology, psychotherapy, and new age content. It contains sections on gender identity and sexuality, neurodiversity, fiction, poetry, and a children's collection. Books are mainly in English, with many in other European and Asian languages.

Running costs are minimal. The library seeks to be as efficient and ecological as possible. One of its priorities is the cataloguing of its archives whilst living memory of the individuals represented in them is still available. It also seeks to raise its profile amongst researchers and to network with other libraries and resources. As an example of this collaboration, the library donates material to other libraries, such as that of the Oxford Buddhist Vihara, which organises shipment of books to Burma/Myanmar and other libraries abroad (Julian Wall, interview with the author, March 21, 2025).

Samatha Trust Libraries

Founded in 1973, the Samatha Trust (2025) focuses on the teaching and practice of meditation in the Samatha-Vipassanā tradition as first taught in the UK by Thai Cambodian monk Nai Boonman (b. 1932). Comprising three centres, all featuring libraries of diverse size, value,

and history, their two main libraries are situated in Greenstreete, Llangullo, Wales, and in Manchester, England.

Created in 1996, The Greenstreete Library – the Samatha Trust's national centre – provides reference material to mediators whilst on retreat. It holds the Pāli Canon in English and Pāli languages and in Sinhalese and Thai scripts, and in other Indian scripts. The focus is on Abhidhamma and Theravāda Buddhism, with an emphasis on esoteric practice. It also has material on Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. It contains over 3,000 volumes and over 300 journal issues, all reference use only.

Image 1: The Greenstreete Library of the Samatha Trust. © The Samatha Trust, used with permission.

Founded in 1977, The Manchester Centre for Buddhist Meditation in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, South Manchester, covers different Buddhist and other spiritual traditions. To this original collection comprising about 1,000 items, a new library in honour of renowned Abhidhamma scholar and founding member of the Samatha Trust L. S. Cousins (1942–2015) is developing with the donation of religious books from Cousin's personal collection following his death in 2015 (Shaw 2019, 354). It also houses most of the collection of Prof. Ian Harris (1952–2014), Buddhist scholar and co-founder, together with Prof. Peter Harvey, of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies in 1996.

Lecturer in Comparative Religion at Manchester University since the 1970s, Cousins was keen that the Manchester Centre should have a library (Samatha Trust Library, n.d.). Intended for scholar-practitioners and with an emphasis on meditation practice widely understood, the library aims at supporting members and other researchers

in their meditation practice and scholarly study. Although study is not a requirement for all practitioners, meditators within the tradition are expected first to have an established meditation practice before they engage in scholarly research. Likewise, the library welcomes researchers who are not meditators.

Samatha's library custodian is Keith Munnings, dharma teacher and Buddhist chaplain, who has been involved with these libraries since 1976. Library services are run by volunteer paraprofessionals, some of whom are academics, such as Harvey, who catalogued the initial Manchester collection. For Munnings, central to the library are the roles of research and networking. For instance, they have established a relationship with the John Rylands Research Institute and Library, which houses manuscript material of interest to members of the Samatha Trust, and where digitization projects such as that of the Pāli language scholar T. W. Rhys Davis collection are underway (Charles Shaw's interview March 18, 2025; Keith Munnings's interview March 21, 2025).

The focus of the collections is the Pāli canon and meditation instruction and study. It comprises 3,000 circulation items, 2,600 reference items, and about 1,000 journal issues. The cataloguing is ongoing. The joint catalogue, available online, uses Libib, a cloud cataloguing system ideal for a library their size and needs (Samatha Trust, n.d.).

Samye Ling Library for World Religions – Samye Ling

Kagyu Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Monastery and Centre for World Peace and Health (2017) is recognized as being the first Tibetan centre established in the West. Founded in 1967 by Akong Rinpoche (1939–2013) and Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939–1987) and located in Eskdalemuir, Scotland, Samye Ling is a monastery, retreat, and cultural centre working for the preservation of Tibetan cultural and spiritual traditions in the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. It currently houses a community of about forty monastics and lay volunteers.

Samye Ling aspires to become a monastic university. The library – a place of study, reflection, and contemplation – is integral to the whole vision of Samye Ling (Thubten and Trinley 2020, 109). Open to everyone regardless of faith or religious practice, interfaith is a key component of life at Samye Ling (Jones, n.d.)

Image 2: Samye Ling Library for World Religions / Kagyu Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Monastery and Centre for World Peace and Health. © Kagyu Samye Ling, used with permission.

Wide in scope and with material in many languages, there are three aspects to the library: a Tibetan collection, a general collection, and a main collection on Buddhist topics. The library collects all material to support all topics taught at Samye Ling including all forms of Buddhism, religions, psychology, philosophy, art and architecture, Tibetan and herbal medicine, therapy, Tibetan language learning, and yoga and tai chi, amongst other subjects. Akong Rinpoche's books and manuscripts are kept separately. Considered a treasure, these are currently not available to the public. Comprising over 15,000 items collected over a forty-year period, the collection is almost fully catalogued, although the catalogue is not yet available online.

The library welcomes and encourages donations and the involvement of volunteers. The library has been impacted by recent factors. Visitors' figures post-Covid-19 pandemic are slowly recovering. Brexit has also affected the number of volunteers able to stay in the monastery as many come from EU countries, hence progress in the library has slowed down. Having been kept by professional librarians in the past, the library is now run by volunteer paraprofessionals. A need for professionalisation of the library has been identified (Ani Lhamo's interview, March 24, 2025).

Centre for Applied Buddhism Library – Soka Gakkai UK

Based on the teachings of thirteenth-century Japanese Buddhist priest Nichiren, Soka Gakkai is a lay organisation engaged in disseminating Buddhist practice and philosophy to achieve a peaceful world. SGI-UK opened its headquarters at Taplow Court in 1990 under the auspices of SGI president Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023). It has about 14,500 members in the UK. The library belongs to the European Branch of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy and supports the work of the Centre for Applied Buddhism (n.d.-a) a centre for research, activism, and dialogue on the intersection of Buddhism and contemporary social and political issues, including climate change, conflict resolution, and human rights, amongst others (SGI-UK, n.d.).

Image 3: The library of the Centre for Applied Buddhism / SGI-UK. © Centre for Applied Buddhism – SGI-UK, used with permission.

The collection contains 25,000 books, around a hundred journals, and several subscriptions (Harte 2024). It comprises sections on all Buddhist traditions and lineages as well as philosophy, art, sociology, and anthropology. Other philosophies and religions are also represented. The collections emphasize practical Buddhism for contemporary times. Besides the Pāli canon and many sections of the Tibetan canon,

there is a complete canon in Chinese (Taishō Tripiṭaka) and many commentarial works. It also has a newspaper clipping collection on Buddhism in the UK since 1990. The lending library is by subscription (Centre for Applied Buddhism, n.d.-b).

The Sangharakshita Library and Exhibition Centre – Adhisthana

The Triratna Buddhist Community, formerly the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), is an international organisation founded by Sangharakshita (1925–2018) in the UK in 1967. Ecumenical in approach, Triratna aims to practice a Buddhism rooted in tradition but applicable to the contemporary world (Buddhist Centre, n.d.).

One of the largest groups in the UK, Triratna has about thirty urban centres as well as retreat centres, arts centres, ethical business, and a publishing house. They have a substantial number of ordained and ordinary members. Based at Adhisthana, in Coddington Court, Ledbury, Herefordshire, its headquarters comprise a training centre, exhibition space, and a library. A library for Triratna has been available and in development at several locations since the 1970s. As the order's library it was housed at Padmaloka Retreat Centre, Norfolk, and then moved to Vajraloka Retreat Centre, North Wales. Purchased in 2013 and opened in 2015, Adhisthana and its library now house over 11,000 books, only a portion of which are currently in their online catalogue. Managed so far by volunteers, some of them with library experience, Adhisthana was organised with input by Dayaka, a conservator at The British Library. Currently led by Dharmalila, the library promotes membership to the Friends of the Sangharakshita Library and encourages volunteers' involvement in running all aspects of the library.

The Sangharakshita Library, named in honour of the founder of Triratna, encapsulates Sangharakshita's vision of a library which would preserve his legacy as writer, teacher, and founder and which would contain the books he had written, bought, and collected over the years, particularly those he had collected during his formative and training years in India. Well connected and influential, Sangharakshita corresponded with leading figures in the arts and religion, such as Alan Ginsberg or Lama Govinda, and many of the books in the collection carry notes and inscriptions by notable individuals, making provenance and ownership research a special feature of this collection. This library contains Sangharakshita's books, papers, letters, and archives. The library also contains the former Dharmavastu Library – a growing

Image 4: Bookshelf at The Sangharakshita Library and Exhibition Centre at Adhisthana / Triratna Community. © Adhisthana / Triratna, used with permission.

collection of books, periodicals, and an extensive electronic library – the core of the lending library (Adhisthana, n.d.).

Gomde UK Library – Rangjung Yeshe Gomde UK Tibetan Buddhist Centre

Gomde UK (n.d.-a) is a Buddhist retreat and meditation centre set in Lindholme Hall, Doncaster, Yorkshire. Led by Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche (b. 1951) and established in 2009, Gomde UK offers Buddhist teachings in the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. With a focus on study and scholarship and led by the community, the library has been an integral part of Gomde UK since its inception. Passionate about libraries and scholarship, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche envisions the library as a space for learning and reflection for residents, visitors, researchers, and the local community. This is paralleled by the number of monastic and research institutes he leads worldwide (Shedrub 2022).

Image 5: Visualization of the projected new space for the Gomde UK Library at The Rangjung Yeshe Gomde UK Tibetan Centre. © The Rangjung Yeshe Gomde UK Tibetan Centre, used with permission.

Gomde UK Library currently occupies a temporary space awaiting completion of the building. It is expected that the library will have a capacity to house about 50,000 items. For the last ten years, trustees and volunteers have been collecting library material in several rooms. The library is currently run by several volunteers and led by academic librarian Rory Caddis, who has been involved in the project since 2022, with the help of a systems librarian helping with metadata description and systems integration. The catalogue, currently at 5,000 items and a few hundred digital texts, uses library management system Koha, MARC21 and RDA framework for bibliographic records, and Library of Congress classification, but call numbers are local (Gomde UK, n.d.-b).

The library seeks to encourage research and collaboration with other libraries and academic institutions worldwide. The catalogue is integrated with the Buddhist Digital Archives at the Buddhist Digital Resource Centre (n.d.) a site making accessible Buddhist scripture in original languages and in translation. The library collaborates with other Buddhist libraries, notably those at Amaravati, currently one of the largest in the UK.

The collection focuses on Vajrayana Buddhism and the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. It holds a restricted collection containing texts requiring conditions for handling or reading, such as empowerments. It also has sections on all Buddhist traditions and lineages as well as on language resources, philosophy, religion, and

psychology, and a children's section. Besides primary and secondary literature, the library houses recently donated complete canons in Tibetan and in Chinese as well as the collections of books and papers of several retired academics, some of which will be added to the archives and special collections, and a substantial donation from The British Library. Notably, the library has a comprehensive collection development policy and a clear mission.

For the future, Gomde UK Library intends to grow their collection, develop their online presence and catalogue capabilities, and build relationships with other Buddhist libraries and research institutions, amongst other projects and commitments. To achieve this, Gomde UK Library acknowledges the need to be run professionally, ideally by CILIP-recognised librarians. Professionalisation of library services and collection development are key in fulfilling Gomde UK's mission of becoming a monastic university (Rory Caddis, interview with the author, March 20, 2025).

Some Other Libraries

To complete this overview, it is worth mentioning a few other Buddhist libraries with substantial collections of between 1,000 and 3,000 items: Birmingham Buddhist Vihara (n.d.), Gaia House (2019) in Devon, Jamyang Buddhist Centre Leeds (2025), Lam Rim Bristol Buddhist Centre (n.d.), London Buddhist Centre (n.d.), and Oxford Buddhist Vihara (2020).

Conclusion

The development of Buddhist libraries constitutes a central phenomenon in the adoption and adaptation of Buddhism in the UK and a key element of its visibility within the British religious landscape and within society. The presence – and absence – of libraries in Buddhist settings mirrors the diversity of Buddhist schools, traditions, and lineages currently practised in the UK. Besides economic and practical considerations, Buddhist library collections reflect a variety of Buddhist experiences and expressions; their views on reading as religious practice and on books as carrying and symbolising knowledge and authority express a diversity of aims, hopes, and worldviews. Reading and book collecting in UK Buddhist contexts are a product of both Western and Buddhist

attitudes towards reading, learning, and religious practice. Ultimately, these attitudes are deeply rooted in ideas of power and authority and how these influence the adaptation and development of Buddhist traditions to new places and times. Buddhist libraries are testimony to the freedom, faithfulness, and zeal with which each tradition expresses and reflects a particular worldview or account of reality. The spectrum of adaptation of Buddhism in the UK is also manifested in the diverse nature of libraries in Buddhist contexts. As this chapter has shown, Buddhist libraries function not only as gateways to knowledge by providing access to resources but also as potent symbols and tangible embodiments of their parent institutions, their lineages, and of the Dharma. Finally, the spirit of information sharing and collaboration embodied by ABTAPL could inspire Buddhist libraries to connect, support one another, and exchange advice.

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Progressive Jewish Libraries and Archives in the UK

An Overview

ALISON TURNER

*I*n 1956, the Jewish world was still adjusting to the post-war realities and a new normal. The Holocaust had wiped out, or nearly extinguished, whole communities across many parts of Europe in the 1940s. The creation of Israel as an independent state by the United Nations in 1947 and the declaration in May 1948 led to war with many neighbouring states. In the early 1950s many more Jewish communities were on the move; it was described by Esther Meir-Glitzenstein as "the mass emigration of about one million Jews from ancient communities that had existed in the Middle East and North Africa for two thousand years or more" (Meir-Glitzenstein 2024). Thus the 1940s had been a time of huge upheaval for Jews worldwide; naturally the Jews in the United Kingdom were affected. There had been an influx of Jews during the 1930s and 1940s as continental Europe became much more dangerous for them. By the 1950s, many of the Jews and their rabbis who had escaped to the UK had returned to mainland Europe, to rebuild what

remained of their shattered communities, or had gone to Israel or the United States. American rabbis were offered to the UK to help fill the gaps, but these were gently declined (Izbicki 1966, 167).

The immediate post-war years saw the emergence of many new Liberal congregations, and each of them sought a lay leader or minister to help them grow. The services could be taken by anyone with sufficient knowledge, with Hebrew language skills and understanding of the liturgy. A rabbi would also provide teaching, offer pastoral care and reach out to new and existing members to help them form and maintain religious communities, in accordance with "*minhag Anglia*", the established customs and practices of Jews in England, and across the United Kingdom (Apple 2018).

There was one exception within the Progressive movement. Some of the refugees who had arrived in Britain during the war brought with them their own customs and traditions and persisted in following them rather than adapting to *minhag Anglia*. Therefore, they set up a community according to the continental Liberal or *liberale* movement, called the New Liberal Congregation. They were initially part of what was then the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, but became fully independent in 1989. It remains an independent Progressive community in Belsize Square, in North London, with a fine synagogue, library and a thriving congregation. Further information is available on their website (Belsize Square Synagogue 2015). For many years, they were celebrated as an example of the diversity which was possible within the Liberal movement.

Liberals and Books

 One distinctive characteristic of Liberal synagogues is that each congregation has its own practices and ways of worship and this is seen as a strength by all concerned. There are prayer books produced for the whole movement, but Rabbis and individual congregations are free to create their own prayer books and service sheets and often do, especially for Jewish festivals or special occasions. Some of these materials have been made available for wider use through a central resource bank, which includes transliterations of the Hebrew into Roman script, music, and short sermons (Liberal Judaism, n.d.-b). "Two Jews, three opinions" is a long-standing phrase to express the diversity of Jewish practice.

Literacy and lifelong learning have long been core strengths of Judaism, so of course, books and libraries have been highly valued across the tradition. As an example, Leo Baeck College has an online Lehrhaus which attracted over 600 students in 2024 (Leo Baeck College, n.d.-c).

Many Liberal congregations have substantial libraries and archives, and even smaller ones are likely to have some books. Clergy typically have their personal libraries, and many Jews have collections of their own, whether they are synagogue members or not. Many Jews consider themselves secular Jews by birth, culture or upbringing. They may well not join religious services, nor find a synagogue that suits them, nor be concerned to find one, but they may still appreciate and own Jewish books in their private libraries. Subjects may include theology and philosophy, literature, history, geography and cookery books, which connect individuals with Jewish roots, leading into new ways to be Jewish in the future.

Most Jews enjoy discussion and debate, and for many years, Jewish Book Week in London brought us together for talks and socialising. It is particularly valued by Jewish library staff as an excellent opportunity to hear new authors, learn about and buy new books for themselves and their libraries. It has been organised since 1952 by the Jewish Book Council, taking place each year in London, though from the 1980s onwards, some events have taken place across the country. The organisers put it on a professional basis in 2005 when the first Director was appointed. It has since evolved to the Jewish Literary Foundation (JLF), and now offers the JLF Player, an online platform giving access to over 1,000 hours of recorded content from the last 17 years (JLF 2025).

Leo Baeck College

This love of prayer and learning for its own sake has been enhanced by Leo Baeck College, which trains rabbis and Jewish educators, and also runs various courses for lay people (Leo Baeck College, n.d.-e). It has been particularly influential in shaping Progressive Jewish life through education and library provision, so I will examine it in detail before turning to a selection of the Liberal congregations and their libraries.

The development of Progressive Judaism in the United Kingdom and Ireland took a huge step forward in November 1955, when the Assembly of Synagogues saw the urgent need for a theological seminary

in England. Rabbi Van der Zyl was asked to consider the matter through a small committee. They were prompt to respond and in late January 1956, they recommended that a room be set aside for teaching, a Director of Studies appointed and lecturers sought (Littmann 1973, 166).

By September 1956, the Jewish Theological College had begun in London with Rabbi Van der Zyl as the first Director of Studies, who was originally from Berlin and had been leading a congregation in London. Another very eminent German Rabbi, Rabbi Dr. Leo Baeck, was also expected to be a lecturer. Unfortunately, Rabbi Baeck fell ill and died in November 1956. The college was promptly renamed in his honour as the Leo Baeck College for the study of Judaism and the training of Rabbis, ministers and teachers (Littman 1973, 169).

In 1964, the college was jointly sponsored by the Reform and Liberal movements in Great Britain and remains so in 2025. It continues to train teachers as well as Rabbis and offers many shorter courses on a variety of subjects for lay people as well as clergy (Leo Baeck College, n.d.-e).

The library has always been an integral part of the College's provision, similarly taking many of its early works from Germany, along with the first librarian. The initial library stock included three collections that had survived the Holocaust. Today, the catalogue is online and features special collections from eminent individuals as well as rare books, educational materials, prayer books, pamphlets, theses and music (Leo Baeck College, n.d.-a).

Additionally, the library holds archival and digital collections of sermons, seminars and lectures from rabbis and teachers such as Rabbi John Rayner. These add richness and depth to the main collection, which supports today's students, alumni, and any individuals who choose to become personal members of the library. The stock policy includes material from across the religious spectrum, around the world, and throughout Jewish history.

From the start, Professor Leon Roth said that the task of the college was to "interpret Judaism to our time and place . . . . Throw your doors open as wide as you can. Have teachers and students of all colours and ideas. And do not be afraid of heretics and heresies. If you have not got any, they should be specially imported" (Littmann 1973, 168). This ideological broadness has continued to be a feature of Progressive Judaism, although the seminary was restricted to men until 1967 (Leo Baeck College, n.d.-d).

In 1975, Rabbi Jackie Tabick became the first woman to be ordained in Europe since Regina Jonas, who was privately ordained in Germany in 1935. In 2025, there was a campaign looking back over 50 years of

women finding their places within the College and the wider movement (Leo Baeck College n.d.-b). Rabbi Pauline Bebe, the first French woman to become a rabbi, wrote about her time at Leo Baeck College by describing first her memories of the library:

> When I think about Leo Baeck College, I can still smell the fragrance of the old books when I was studying, sitting on the library's floor. It was like being in a dream, entering its library, late at night; with no time limit, no one around, and enveloped by the atmosphere of the night's calm. It was like having a quiet discussion with all these past giants who were sharing some of the secrets of their souls. (Bebe 2025)

This is a beautiful way of expressing the value of the place and its contents to the students, past and present.

The College librarian has generally been active as a scholar as well as a librarian, and from the start women and men have taken this role (Dorfler 1966, 170). The library itself began in a windowless basement at the West London Synagogue, with a collection of books but no study space. A major improvement came in 1965. The West London Synagogue Annexe was consecrated, with three lecture rooms for the College, a lounge, and at last, there was a modern library with room for students to work (Boeckler 2008, 9).

The first collections were given by the Society of Jewish Study, and consisted of many books stamped "Archival Depot Offenbach/Main." This was the gathering place at the end of the war for books and Judaica that had been looted by the Nazis from European Jews and institutions, including synagogues, *Seminarin Breslau* and the *Berlin Hochschule* (Littman 1973, 177). The first librarian, Jenny Dorfler, was also from the *Hochschule* (Boeckler 2008, 7), and one of the earliest donations was the library of the late Rabbi Dr. Leo Baeck, given by his daughter, Ruth Berlak (Boeckler 2008, 8-9).

Another early benefactor was Dr. Leonard Montefiore, who gave a cheque for the purchase of journals when he found the library had no budget for these. He was always keen to see books in German from the 17th and 18th centuries, and is remembered for spending hours poring over *Chronicles of Frankfurt a/m* from 1706, marking instances of antisemitism with little slips of paper (Dorfler 1966, 171).

The connection with Germany continues. In recent years, the library has been part of and hosted provenance workshops for the Library of Lost Books, which seeks to find volumes from the last Berlin Progressive seminary. This institution was founded as the Higher

Institute for Jewish Studies in 1872, and later known as the Berlin Hochschule (Schwartz 2023). From the early days, the institute had ethics and philosophy at its heart, rather than Jewish law or history. Professor Dr. Daniel Schwartz defined it as different from other institutions in its enquiries as to "what Judaism has to say about universal ethics, universal philosophy (Schwartz 2023).

The Nazis had begun to loot Jewish libraries systematically in 1938, both public and private, aiming to create their own library, the *Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschland*, which would be used to write their own distorted version of history. After they lost the war, the looted books were scattered all over the world and have turned up in flea markets, as well as academic libraries, public libraries, and in private hands (Schwartz 2023). They have still not all been found, so this is a large-scale, ongoing citizen science project to look for them.

In the 1960s, there was still no money to buy books or journals, so a lot of the stock was donated, including a substantial acquisition from the library of the late Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie, thanks to a donor, Ralph Yablon (Boeckler 2008, 9). The first full-time librarian was Dr. Hyam Maccoby in 1975. In 1982, he planned the move of the library to its current location, the Sternberg Centre for Judaism in North London. Under his guidance, it started to become one of Europe's greatest libraries of modern Judaica, alongside its historical collections, which go back 500 years (Boeckler 2008, 10).

A later librarian described that Dr. Maccoby managed the library in the classical style of 19th-century academic libraries, in that he knew every book and therefore saw no need for a catalogue. Anyone wanting a book would ask him and he would advise them. He retired in 1994 and was followed by Dr. Piet van Boxel who understood the need for a catalogue and that it should be on the computer. Being unable to afford an OPAC, his friend Joop van Klink wrote a specialised computerised cataloguing program, Sefer Search. This remarkable program was able to handle entries in Hebrew, Cyrillic and Greek as well as Roman script, without the need for transliteration. It was completed in 2000, when the entire library collection was catalogued.

The classification system is also a specialised one for libraries of Judaica, devised by David H. Elazar and Daniel J. Elazar (Boeckler 2008, 13). Today, the library has a lively OPAC using the open-source software Koha as the library management system. There is a detailed account of the library staff and significant holdings and donations in an article by the scholar librarian, Dr. Annette Boeckler (Boeckler

2008). She was the scholar librarian and lecturer for Bible and Jewish Liturgy at Leo Baeck College.

The current librarian is Cassy Sachar, who is proud to be able to expand the library from its current rooms in the basement of Leo Baeck College to create a reading room on the ground floor (Sachar, pers. comm. February 25, 2025). It will be the first time the library can offer step-free access and this new facility, offering a welcoming and inspiring environment, is sure to be much appreciated. Library staff will continue to provide books from the basement to the ground floor as required by users, and the extra space will allow for its development as a community resource for the wider Jewish public.

Plans for the future include broadening the stock to take in more material from the Sephardi world, which means communities from Spain and Portugal, as well as other diverse Jewish communities worldwide (Sachar, pers. comm. February 25, 2025). In common with much of Anglo-Jewry, the College library has been predominantly the stories of Jews from the communities of Germany, Poland and Eastern Europe, who are known as Ashkenazi Jews. One proof of this is the languages of the texts found in the library: English, Hebrew, German, Yiddish, French and Russian (Leo Baeck College, n.d.-a).

Another proposal is to take library stock to individual synagogues; some are close enough to visit the library, but a travelling collection would allow congregations outside North London to access the holdings (Sachar, pers. comm. February 25, 2025).

Digital access will, of course, assist with attracting more users outside North London. One current project is to digitise lectures and sermons which are still only on audio cassette tape, and now considered fragile and likely to disintegrate very soon. Volunteers have been digitising one or two tapes a week to assist library staff. This will enable the lectures and sermons will be accessible to a much wider audience (Sachar, pers. comm. February 25, 2025). I know from my own experience that researchers presented with an audio cassette tape are reluctant to listen to it, even when provided with a Sony Walkman. In my case, they opted to read the transcript instead.

A further concern is that the last generation of Holocaust survivors is passing away (Turner 2025). The library is committed to preserve the works they cared about and studied, maintaining a tangible link to that era in Jewish history and many others for the next generation.

The library stands on the shoulders of past giants of Liberal Judaism, such as Lily Montagu, who was one of the founders of Liberal Judaism; many of the library's copies of her books are inscribed in her own

hand. Among other notable past students was Rabbi Sheila Shulman, who was one of the first lesbians ordained at Leo Baeck College and went on to be an influential teacher there. One of the treasures of the library is her daily prayer book, presented by the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain on the occasion of her joining the College in 1984. The volume is annotated with her notes and marks, thus it offers a rare insight into her concerns and theological development (Assembly 1977).

Her way of dealing with the difficulty of finding a congregation that would accept her was, like the German refugees before her, to found a new congregation. In 1990, together with a group of lesbian friends, she founded *Beit Klal Yisrael* (BKY, 2025), the first synagogue to be a home for LGBT Jews in Britain, though open to anyone. Through her work at Leo Baeck College, she inspired a generation of rabbis. The class of 2017, which might have been the last year group she taught, could almost be described as her disciples! They now serve many Liberal and Reform congregations in the United Kingdom and the wider world, carrying with them her passion for learning and enquiry (BKY 2014).

By coincidence, Elizabeth Sarah was another lesbian who joined Leo Baeck College at the same time as Sheila Shulman, and she has written about her experience (Sarah 2012). She says of her colleague:

> Ordained in 1989, Sheila brought all of who she was as a lesbian, a radical feminist, a teacher and a writer to her rabbinate in every context . . . . [She] was a beloved teacher at Leo Baeck College, where she taught Jewish thought. One of Sheila's greatest accomplishments as a rabbi was to mentor many individuals on their journeys into the rabbinate, inspiring several people to become rabbis over the years. (Sarah 2016)

As an archivist, I am delighted to see that one of Rabbi Sheila's sermons is preserved online (Shulman 2000) so future generations can get a taste of her words.

The library continues to welcome new generations of students and hopes to continue being a springboard for their creativity. The College has attracted many students from around the world, some of whom return to their own countries to found new Progressive congregations; the library stock reflects this diversity both geographically and historically. It is enriched by donations from alumni who value the support it gave them as students and return regularly for rabbinic in-service training and get-togethers of many sorts.

The librarian was honoured to be chosen by recent ordinands to speak at their ordination ceremony, recognising how crucial the library

and its staff have been to their studies. The Dean and Director of Jewish Studies at Leo Baeck College itself, Rabbi Dr. Charles Middleburgh, is now proud to say that some 90% of Rabbis serving UK Progressive congregations have received semicha (rabbinical training leading to ordination) from Leo Baeck College and many other ordinands have gone on to found and lead congregations throughout Europe. It is very gratifying to see the success of this college and its centrality to Progressive Judaism has been enhanced by its library, information and archives services.

Liberal Jewish Synagogue

Turning from the college to the synagogues themselves, I begin with the Liberal Jewish Synagogue (LJS) in St John's Wood in North London. This was the first Liberal synagogue in the UK, hence its name. It was founded in 1911, with an American becoming its first Rabbi, Israel Mattuck. He was one of the Three M's considered the founders of Liberal Judaism, along with Lily Montagu and Claude Montefiore (Liberal Judaism, n.d.-b). Of these, Claude was an Oxford-educated Anglo-Jewish scholar, coming under the influence of Jowett and T. H. Green, who had intended to become a Reform rabbi but found himself out of sympathy with their thinking and turned to scholarship instead (Alderman 2004a).

Lily Montagu came from an Orthodox family, and she worked as a social worker among London's poor, first in the East End and then across London (Alderman 2004b). For many years, Miss Lily, as she was widely known, ran the Jewish Religious Union (JRU) and the LJS from the same premises, and did much of the work from her home nearby, assisted by her sisters, Marian and Henrietta (Alderman 2004b). The JRU was the forerunner of Liberal Judaism, formed because of declining attendances at Orthodox services, leading Lily Montagu to propose a new form of worship with a greater spirituality and more English used in services (Alderman 2004b). It became clear that the changes could not be accepted by Orthodox Rabbis and so with her supporters, they approached a Reform congregation, the West London Synagogue. However, there were disagreements with them over such matters as mixed seating for men and women (Alderman 2004b) and it was clear that a new Synagogue was needed.

The library at LJS is named after Israel Abrahams, who studied under Claude Montefiore, and was also a progressive scholar (Diamond

2010). It houses around 6,000 books, many of which were donated by members from the early twentieth century, both founders and activists (Liberal Jewish Synagogue n.d.-a). Thus, it indicates subjects of interest at the time, to which Sally Van Noorden, the honorary librarian, seeks to add modern-day texts.

Much of the older material, such as Jowett's sermons, has heritage value, though they are not widely read in recent times. The library now works with the Archives of the LJS under a Heritage committee, which replaced the former library committee a few years ago. This means that both services can work together to create exhibitions and events to celebrate milestones in Liberal Judaism and educate and interest synagogue members and visitors on the history of the synagogue, along with changes over the years and decades. As an archivist of Liberal Judaism, I have worked with both the archivist and librarian of LJS to research suitable topics and have provided items from the central Archives for exhibitions at LJS.

The LJS library uses its own classification system, devised in the 1960s, with records going back to that time, though some of the stock is clearly much older. As is common, much of the stock has been donated by past and present members. The primary criterion of inclusion is that a book should be of Jewish interest, although the librarian does accept books written by members on all sorts of topics.

The main classification subjects are archaeology, Bible and Biblical studies, Rabbinic and other commentaries, apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, literature, philosophy, Judaism, history, sociology, inter-faith studies, Israel, Hebrew and liturgy. The synagogue has a thriving religion school, adult education and a scholar in residence. Teachers will let the library staff know which books they are recommending and the librarian will also try to have books mentioned in sermons and addresses. She has a bias towards adding liturgy, Bible studies, thought and history rather than fiction, which is available elsewhere. There are also CDs and DVDs, though new ones are not bought, now that they are less in demand. Periodicals are also not bought, though some are donated, along with pamphlets, which might go to the archives rather than the library.

The library is open whenever the building is open, with LJS members trusted to borrow and return stock themselves. The catalogue is available online (Liberal Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues Jewish Synagogue n.d.-a). There used to be a team of congregants trained by specialists to conserve some of the books, but now the archivist arranges to have books repaired or rebound. The librarian is

a member of the Hebraica Libraries Group and has done presentations for them on the library stock, how it is classified and how the library is run. These are available from her on request.

Expansion of Liberal Congregations

Following the creation of the LJS, new synagogues were established across London in north, south and central areas, followed by Liverpool, Birmingham, Brighton and Hove, Dublin and Leicester. In the 1960s, these had been joined by Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation, Nottingham, Bedfordshire and Kingston (Liberal Judaism n.d.-a).

By 1968, led by rabbis such as John Rayner, Sidney Brichto and Bernard Hooker, Liberal Jewish congregations had been founded across the south of England and the Midlands. These were joined by synagogues in the Thames Valley, Peterborough, East Anglia, Buckinghamshire, Herefordshire, Kent, Lincolnshire and Eastbourne by the time of the centenary of the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues (ULPS) in 2002, and the list has expanded to nearly 40 congregations by 2025. Most of these are in England, though Dublin was an early exception; subsequently, Edinburgh joined ULPS along with further outposts of Or Chadash Liberal Jewish Community in Luxembourg and Shir Hatzafon in Copenhagen (Path to Progressive Judaism. n.d).

Some of the expansion is due to Jews becoming more geographically mobile, moving out from their once-thriving communities in North London to the outskirts of London, and further afield. I moved from North London myself and am now a member of the Three Counties Liberal Jewish Community, which consists of Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire. This community began in Herefordshire, led by Rabbi Bernard Hooker, who thought he had retired to the area but was astonished to find a new congregation – many of whom had thought they were the only Jew in the area (Liberal Judaism 2019).

It used to be thought that most modern Progressive Jews were urban and preferred to live in cities, but rural Progressive Jewish life is enhanced by being part of a Jewish community. Some parts of Progressive Judaism can be practised individually, but many of the rituals and prayers are to be said only in community.

Libraries and books continue to be central to Judaism for those of us living outside the major concentrations of British Jews in London

and Manchester. There are substantial Progressive Jewish libraries in the Birmingham and Bristol congregations, and a large amount of mostly older material at the Anglo-Jewish Archives at the University of Southampton (Kushner and Robson 2024).

Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation

I have to admit a bias here: I used to be a member of this congregation, and when I joined, I was impressed by the fine library. It was funded by a bequest and named after the donor. It has a bespoke catalogue system devised by Jo Schapiro, one of the members at the time (Bristol 2025). Like many synagogue libraries, it is run by volunteers. The classification scheme is similar to one I have seen used in many small Jewish organisations, using a mixture of letters and numbers.

The subjects covered start with the Bible, Rabbinic literature and Kabbalah, mysticism and folklore. These are followed by general texts on Judaism, philosophy, Progressive Judaism, festivals, prayer books, Israel, Jews worldwide, education, literature, reference books, Hebrew, Yiddish and finally the dreaded miscellaneous, itself subdivided into other faiths, art, music, food, and other subjects. I have listed these because this seems to me fairly typical of the subjects covered by a synagogue library. It is arranged so that synagogue members can self-issue books and return them to a shelf for later reshelving.

There are comfortable armchairs and a sofa, which are popular with the religious school pupils, teachers and parents of pupils. The children have their own, much smaller library in one of the classrooms. The adult library provides a pleasant reading room, and books can be taken into a nearby classroom for serious study at tables and upright chairs. The children also have puzzles and games in their library for those not tempted by books.

The library is open before, during and after services and education classes for adults and children. The volunteers do not have any professional support, but they have links with other synagogues in Bristol and Leicester, as well as specialist booksellers. This allows them to weed the library stock for unwanted duplicates and works that are too scholarly or otherwise little used and pass them on to a more appropriate synagogue library.

As a provincial congregation, Bristol is quite sizable, so it has been fortunate to have a substantial library, which continues to attract donations of stock and volunteers to run it.

Archives

I have been London-based during my professional life, and worked closely with The London Archives, formerly known as the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), in Farringdon. When the second oldest Liberal synagogue, North London Progressive Synagogue, founded in 1921, closed its doors some 80 years later, the archives were passed to the LMA, as it was then, in consultation with their staff. This was an addition to their existing holdings of Liberal Jewish material from the Liberal Jewish Synagogue and from many other Jewish bodies.

When I came to look at what Reform congregations and their parent body had done, I found that they had moved in a different direction, as outlined by Tony Kushner and Karen Robson (2024). The Anglo-Jewish Archives, a special collection housed at the University of Southampton, contains records of the West London Synagogue of British Jews (1836–2000), as well as from the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain (1942–2008). Leo Baeck College records (1956–1997) are also there, along with some of the personal collections of papers of Rabbi Bernard Hooker and Rabbi Israel Mattuck and one of South London Liberal's founders, Samuel Rich (1904–1949).

The Rich family now has five generations of Liberal Jews, an answer to those who were concerned that Progressive Judaism would not be as rigorous as Orthodox Judaism, and would be an easier option for people, who would then assimilate more fully and cease to identify as Jews at all. This has been a constant concern among Anglo-Jewry, and my position as an archivist means I have seen this argument in print many times over the decades. An example from the Archives is *Fallacies and facts about Liberal Judaism* by Rev. Bernard Hooker, published by the ULPS in 1961 (Hooker, 1961).

Conclusion and Future Plans

I have given an overview of the development of Progressive Jewish libraries and archives in the United Kingdom in the past 70 years, with a look back to the turbulent 1940s and early 1950s, leading to the formation of Leo Baeck College in London in 1956, from its origins in Germany. The College library has been an integral part of its offering and its collection of material on Progressive Judaism is one of its many strengths. I outlined the importance of reading, books and lifelong

learning to Progressive Jews, both through the College and events such as Jewish Book Week.

From there, I discussed the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, the oldest and one of the biggest congregations, with a library to match, rich in history and continuing to serve its community today. I then traced this with an indication of how widely Progressive Judaism has spread throughout England, with a few congregations elsewhere, such as in Edinburgh, Dublin and Copenhagen. The Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation is an example of a smaller, provincial community, attracting people from Wales as well as the West of England. Its library is a good example of how one legacy can stimulate a community's growth, providing historical grounding in Liberal and Progressive Judaism, as a springboard for today's Jewish concerns and a resource for both children and adults.

I finished with a look at Jewish archives in general and where Liberal Judaism and the Movement for Reform Judaism have taken different paths, with material from their earliest synagogues and their own records.

Progressive Judaism is undergoing another major change to be completed in 2026. Historically, there have been two major strands of Progressive Judaism in the UK. My own experience lies with the newer one, Liberal Judaism, which was founded in 1902 in London, with the first synagogue, the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, established in 1911 (Liberal Jewish Synagogue n.d.-a).

The other one is the Movement for Reform Judaism, which began in 1840, with the first synagogue, the West London Synagogue, which was consecrated in 1842. However, unlike Liberal Judaism, in Reform congregations, the unification under a parent body came much later. It was not until 1942 that the various Reform synagogues joined together to form the Associated British Synagogues, which was largely educational in purpose. Later on, they expanded their areas of cooperation and took the name ASGB (Association of Synagogues of Great Britain), which was changed to RSGB (Reform Synagogues of Great Britain) and then ultimately to the Movement for Reform Judaism (Kershen 1995).

In April 2023, both Liberal Judaism (LJ) and the Movement for Reform Judaism (MRJ) announced their intention to co-create one Progressive movement in the UK, to replace both Reform and Liberal movements. As an archivist, I note that this is not the first attempt to bring the two movements in line with the rest of the world, where typically only one Progressive movement exists in each country (Meyer 1995).

Theologically and practically, the differences that existed between the two movements have diminished. Both movements were headed by a rabbi; Liberal Judaism by Rabbi Charley Baginsky and the Movement for Reform Judaism by Rabbi Josh Levy, who trained together at Leo Baeck College. Each Movement had around forty congregations, so together as co-leads, the two Rabbis undertook a long process of consultation and development with all eighty of them, in person and online. This was followed by all congregations and clergy voting on the change and will culminate in the co-creation of the new organisation, to be called the Movement for Progressive Judaism, expected to be active from early 2026.

A website, Path to Progressive Judaism (2025), was set up to keep people informed about the process. There will be a new website for the new Movement for Progressive Judaism in due course. There is not going to be any attempt to impose uniformity of belief or worship across Progressive Judaism. All congregations will be free to keep the names they already have, along with their prayer books and customs, although some have already started working closely with nearby congregations.

Since this historic change has only recently been agreed upon at the time of writing, the library, information and archive policy of the new organisation is not yet defined. Liberal Jewish archives began with the manuscripts by Lily Montagu, who was then only 19 years old, writing in the 1890s. That became a published article in 1902, which started a debate and then a movement and a synagogue, which became Liberal Judaism.

Over time, the archives progressed through meeting minutes written by hand to typescript and carbon copies of letters, and then to digital archives. It will be fascinating to see how the library and archive policy of the Movement for Progressive Judaism will develop over the years and decades to come, building on what has gone before. This has always been the essence of Progressive Judaism: to take the best of tradition and incorporate modernity, current social concerns and theological thinking alike.

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Theological Libraries for Alternative Spiritualities

JOANNE FITZPATRICK

*I*n this chapter I explore the available library and information provision for the group of varied practices under the term *alternative spiritualities*. In the British context this mainly encompasses the new religious movements of neopaganism and by extension witchcraft and the occult. To begin with, there will be a full explanation of these terms and what they include and involve, alongside how important the activities of British individuals and movements have been to their development. This will be followed by an examination of what a Pagan theological library should and could be in theory, with details of current libraries and archives that cover this subject matter.

Subsequent sections will describe the library and information needs of the population of adherents to these spiritualities, and some of the unique considerations, as well as the common issues encountered. The chapter will express a clear need for the professional

expertise of librarians and the barriers to accessing that, suggesting some innovative solutions to overcoming them.

Alternative Spirituality and New Religious Movements

This chapter will draw on a range of terms to describe the group of religious practices and spiritualities that it covers. The issues regarding definitions will be briefly discussed, using references from literature, but ultimately deciding on working definitions for the context of this chapter.

The term *alternative spirituality* has been chosen for the chapter title to denote the focus on unconventional and minority religions and spiritualities born of a kind of counterculture or "rejected religion" approach to practice. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to Paganism and the occult as "minority" practices, referencing Census 2021 data showing that less than 0.1% of the UK stated they follow some type of these practices by writing in a response under "other religion" (Office for National Statistics 2022; Pagan, Wicca, Druid, etc. – the percentage is all of those together). This could be increased to estimate around 0.5% or less, if you consider those who think of this as a spirituality not a religion, and therefore selected "No Religion" on the census. Alternative spirituality is often used interchangeably with the term *new religious movements*, which are notoriously difficult to define, as Oliver (2012, 9) established: "A 'new' religion may in fact be rather similar to an existing mainstream faith and not represent a belief system which is in any way radically different. On the other hand, a new movement may be very clearly an alternative spirituality and be part of what one might term the religion counter-culture."

With the term *new religious movements* in particular, the focus is often on the twin concepts of "sects" and "cults," described by Bromley (2016, 22) as also being problematic, ". . . the sect–church–cult typology excluded some religious groups, miscategorized others, and was not inclusive enough to handle a broader range of religious traditions, particularly new religious groups . . . . Groups in the Western Esotericism tradition were sometimes treated simply as sects." This is in contrast to Western Esotericists themselves being comfortable with the categorisation "cult," as seen in the seminal title *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Murray 1921, 12), "Ritual Witchcraft—or, as I propose to call it, the Dianic cult—embraces the religious beliefs and ritual of the people known in late mediaeval times as 'Witches'."

This chapter will therefore also use the term *new religious movements* (interchangeably with *alternative spirituality*) to acknowledge the multifaceted nature and relevance of this term, and the focus on religious practices that have their origins in the living memory of the latter half of the 20th Century.

While appearing in a volume that is specifically defined as theological, denoting a focus on religion, many individuals within this group do not see their practices this way, preferring the term *spirituality*. How these differences are viewed within this group is captured well by van Neikerk (2018, 455), who states that religion is seen as institutionalised yet based in specific community and sacred meaning, while spirituality is freer, holistic and accepting of syncretism and individual choice, but that may lose meaningful unity. Modern practitioners of Paganism and the occult are free to describe their practices in either way.

The British Connection

Now that the religious area concerned is established, I will describe the specific contribution of British individuals, groups and movements. In the influential book *The Triumph of the Moon*, Hutton (1999, 237) described the development of the modern practices defined in the previous section, which he did not link to historical practices, and this was a significant revelation at the time of publishing. While some individuals working under the belief of an unbroken historical lineage found this difficult, many practitioners, including myself, enjoy modern practice as being inspired by the past, or functioning as a reiteration or improvement on it. Hutton begins not in an ancient pre-Christian past, but in 1939 with the figure of Gerald Gardner, a British witch credited with devising the modern practice of Wicca that was then "exported" to America and beyond, and has become the dominant form of contemporary witchcraft. The year marks his initiation into a coven by a mysterious figure named only as "Old Dorothy."

Based on Murray's work (1921; also British), the historical validity of which has been near universally rejected, Wicca is described by White (2015, 17) in this way: "By this time [the 1970s] the ahistoricity of the Wiccan origin myth . . . would matter little, because the Craft had already come to establish itself as a thriving new religious movement." Hutton (2003, 279) is often quoted as stating that Wicca is ". . . the only full-formed religion which England can be said to have given

the world." It rose in popularity after the repeal of the witchcraft act in 1951 and is today seen as the most common form of Pagan practice.

Hutton also describes Gardner's relationship to Aleister Crowley, another English occultist who created the tradition of Thelema: ". . . he visited Crowley and was initiated into the . . . Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO)" (1999, 206). Hutton (2012, 286–287) again tells us more about this link, of how Gardner was asked to become leader of the OTO (an organisation that Crowley led from 1925–1947) but refused in order to concentrate on Wicca.

The creation of Thelema is pinpointed earlier, although still not at all within ancient history, to 1904, when "Crowley penned The Book of the Law . . . dictated to him by a discarnate entity named Aiwass" (Hedenborg White 2020, 2), and was born out of Crowley's expertise built through intense training with the British group The Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn (HOGD).

The Golden Dawn was a significant esoteric order founded in 1888 and headquartered in London, the teachings of which were published by Israel Regardie in 1937. Regardie was initiated in Bristol in 1934 into an offshoot of the Golden Dawn, Stella Matutina, and ". . . he quickly became disillusioned with the generalized opposition to the practice of practical magic within the order . . . . The only solution that would ensure the revitalization of the HOGD current, Regardie surmised, was to break his oaths of secrecy and make public the teachings and rituals of the order" (Plaisance 2015, 11).

Later, this new era of post-witchcraft act development based on Golden Dawn practices would give rise to the practices of neo-Druidry. In a study of the most prominent organisation in this tradition – the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids – Lakey-White (2009, 1) described Druidry as, "it seeks to incorporate the Zeitgeist of the ancient Celts into a new (and admittedly modern) practice." Hutton (2009, 314) identified the roots of this contemporary development as centring on the group the Church of the Universal Bond, which was again founded in Britain.

Sometimes presented as a native British spirituality, this is only true if the definition of "indigeneity" is augmented. The common usage of the word, according to Owen (2013, 111), is that, "Indigenous peoples are often defined as the colonized, or formerly colonized, first inhabitants who are marginalized within a dominant culture," a definition that is not only incorrect for British inhabitants, but is incredibly risky to use as it paves the way for nationalist behaviour. Instead, if it is considered as "a religion that relates to the land, the

people (inclusively) and that which has gone before" (Owen 2013, 111) with ties specifically to the land, rather than nation, and a focus on the status of "alternative" spirituality as previously discussed, then it becomes a way of again defining these practices as being in the minority.

Later still, in 1978 with the publication of the book *Liber Null*, Chaos Magick was developed, again in the UK, specifically within meetings held at the Sorcerer's Apprentice shop in Leeds. Heavily influenced by the magickal ideas of Austin Osman Spare, a British artist active in the same era as Crowley above, they were developed by Peter J. Carroll into a kind of "modernization of magic [that] developed into the results-based, practical, and chaos theory– infused magic that distinguished Chaos Magick from other forms of occultism" (Partridge 2014, 407).

Accordingly, British individuals and organisations founded here are clearly central to the development of this group of alternative spiritualities as new religious movements. In addition to Hutton's assertion that Wicca is England's gift to the world, I forward the idea that Britain has also birthed Thelema, contemporary Druidry and Chaos Magick into the world. But what kind of information resources do practitioners of these religions seek and use, and what does the available library provision look like?

The Information Needs of Modern Practitioners

Building on my own master's thesis (Fitzpatrick 2022a) that researched this exact question, information and resource needs are incredibly varied and strongly influenced by an individual practitioner's relationship with their religion. Giving an example referred to already, if a Druid or Heathen (Germanic Paganism) is particularly interested in historically accurate practice, because for them this is what they value and find power in, then this is very different to someone like myself, experienced in Wicca and Chaos Magick, who loves that this is a religion created within living memory by people just like myself that I can incorporate modern phenomena into.

My research involved creating a model that showed seven "dualities" that impact on a modern Pagan's relationship with information:

1. Rationality vs. mysteries
2. Academia vs. inner knowing
3. Authority vs. anarchy
4. Re-construction vs. inspiration

5. Mass rejection vs. genetic fallacy
6. Happy accident vs. meaningful serendipity
7. Salience vs. secrecy

In order to avoid repeating the contents of my paper, I can explain these dualities by describing my own relationship with them. For the first, I am someone who values logic and rationality slightly more, yet acknowledge there are times when it is fun to be surprised. For the second, I lean much more towards inner knowing, understanding that relying on non-rational knowledge is a key skill as an occultist and preferring to leave the academia at work. I sit in the middle of the third duality, thinking of institutionalised versions of my practices and rebellion against them as an important perpetually cycling process. For the fourth duality, I place myself very extremely towards inspiration, finding value in aspects that work for me now and not feeling enchanted by the past, as I do for the fifth duality with genetic fallacy where I consider myself to have strong skills in separating the ideas from the person. The sixth is the same, where I view serendipitous discovery of information as being highly meaningful and strongly connected to my practices. Finally, the seventh, as an advocate of open access I am slightly more towards salience and I think there are many benefits to open working here, but additionally I really value privacy and the areas of practice where that is essential.

This impacts the kind of information I seek and how I seek it. I will look for practitioner authors, rather than academics, as I value the accounts of those who have experience. I do not have a strategy for finding content as I consider discovery to have meaning and will rely on a kind of luck much more, and I am not concerned with historically accurate books and so assessing the quality of them for me looks very different. A different person will systematically search for well researched and factually verifiable accounts of practices instead.

For the purposes of this chapter, I asked 10 of my peers where they personally placed themselves on these scales via completing a Google form. I include the following graphs that show the responses for a scale from 1–10 for each duality, 1 denoting an extreme preference for the first concept and 10 for the second. The results highlight the wide variation amongst just a small cohort of practitioners working closely within the same groups.

Table 1: Results of 10 practitioners placing themselves on each scale

CONCEPT 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	CONCEPT 2
Rationality	0	2	1	2	1	0	1	1	2	0	Mysteries
Academia	0	1	1	1	2	1	2	0	0	2	Inner Knowing
Authority	0	1	1	0	2	1	4	0	0	1	Anarchy
Reconstruction	0	0	0	1	0	3	2	3	1	0	Inspiration
Mass Rejection	1	0	2	0	2	1	1	2	0	1	Genetic Fallacy
Happy Accident	0	0	1	0	3	0	3	2	1	0	Meaningful Serendipity
Salience	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	Secrecy

What is an Alternative Spirituality Theological Library?

While there are no large churches or training seminaries within the UK that may contain an accompanying library, there are a small number of existing bricks and mortar libraries in this theological area that I can begin by describing. The leading example of this is the Library of Avalon (2015) in Glastonbury, which describes itself as "an Educational Charity which provides resources for learning and research into Esoteric Knowledge," is funded through donations and subscriptions and staffed with unpaid trustees and volunteers. The collection consists of a maximum of 13,300 titles with a core focus on its special collections of Arthurian literature, Glastonbury local study and associated mythology. The collection management policy describes this as the primary subject, with secondary, tertiary and quaternary subjects also defined in the policy covering broader themes such as esoteric religion and spirituality, earth mysteries and world mythology.

There is also the Museum of Witchcraft and Magick in Boscastle, which alongside an artefact collection has an archive of books and documents with an online catalogue, and is funded though museum visit fees and patronages. The document archive consists of former object listings and documents that have the potential to become museum displays, such as magazines, ephemera, or writings of former

Image 1: Entrance to the Library of Avalon. Credit: Library of Avalon, used with permission.

museum owners, and while it functions as an archive of the museum rather than an archive within the museum, it contains copies of key documents that can be accessed on request.

Both of these examples are incredibly influential within communities of practitioners, with the Museum of Witchcraft and Magick in particular being founded by Cecil Williamson, who was deeply involved in the development of Wicca. Cornish (2020, 419) described the museum's role as "Contemporary witches who visit the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic see it as a valuable heritage resource." Similarly, the Library of Avalon, based in Glastonbury, serves as an important centre for the preservation and dissemination of esoteric knowledge. Over the years, both institutions have fostered strong community links, acting as hubs for local and visiting spiritual communities (who often think of visits as "pilgrimages"), hosting talks, study groups, and events that encourage discussion and learning. Through these connections, both institutions have become more than just repositories of knowledge; they actively contribute to the living traditions they represent, strengthening contemporary engagement with historical and spiritual practices.

In addition to these more public access offerings, there are several special collections available at research institutions with a strong subject specialism, such as the Ferguson collection at the University of Glasgow or the Harry Price Library at the University of London. Ferguson was a professor at the University of Glasgow and the institution bought the collection after his death in 1921; it contains rare books of alchemy, occult sciences and witchcraft, amongst other subjects such as chemistry. Price, a researcher interested in psychic phenomena, bequeathed his collection to the institution in 1936, and it contains a large number of rare books and periodicals. Again these span multiple subjects, which includes witchcraft and the occult, and has a focus on exposing illusions. Other collections of this type exist, such as special collections at the Warburg Institute, and a small collection within the Lady Margaret Hall Library at the University of Oxford.

These are all historical and rare books, dated long before the development of the modern traditions described earlier in this chapter, and therefore have limited relevance and standing within modern communities.

While there are isolated examples of more modern archives, these are situated outside of the UK, such as the "New Age Movements, Occultism, and Spiritualism Research Library" at Valdosta State University (Frost 2018). This particular archive contains personal materials of Guy Frost, a contemporary Pagan, including books, periodicals and study notes, and was specifically created in response to student research needs.

Another type of library provision are those available to the members of more institutionalised practices, such as the Theosophical Society in England and Wales, which provides members access to a physical library and postal borrowing. Theosophy, while founded in New York, has a strong presence in the UK and has practices based on mysticism influenced by eastern religions, which is considered a form of occultism. A further example of this type is the Museum of Freemasonry, which provides public access to collections, although Masonic orders will also offer resource provision at individual lodges for members. It goes without saying that these are well used, but only by members of the relevant organisations.

While I have described the available specialised library offers and their users, in practice most practitioners are not reliant on library collections, instead mostly buying books on the private market (and often reselling the physical copies secondhand). Although many of

Image 2: Entrance to the Library and Museum of Freemasonry. Photo by Cristian Bortes.

these libraries are seen positively by Pagan practitioners in terms of community engagement and the positive effect on advocacy or legitimisation of these religions, their user base is highly specialised to specific groups or research topics. Public libraries are one option for

general practitioners given this, however their collection development policies are heavily dependent on representing their user base, and as these are minority practices, it is often not viable in terms of cost per usage for public libraries to have comprehensive coverage.

When moving from libraries that have a physical home to digital-only library provision, this is a different story, with many practitioners making use of the Internet Sacred Text Archive and the Hermetic Library, both extensive websites that contain public domain works within the subject. This type of easily accessible and shareable content is essential to many practitioners worldwide, and both of these examples are personal projects hosted by their current owners in the US. These kinds of resources are much more likely to be widely used by practitioners.

Considering that these digital examples feature out-of-copyright material, when it comes to books bound by intellectual property, it is still much more likely that a practitioner will buy an e-book for personal use. However, it also needs to be stated that the illegal sharing of this digital content is a common occurrence, achieved through various methods, such as dedicated online repositories or user-to-user torrenting, which are sometimes referred to as Shadow Libraries or Black Open Access. Greene (2015) and Bustamonte (2022) blogged about this issue within alternative spirituality communities, highlighting the impact on authors. Books in this sector are highly likely to be produced by small publishers, written by authors with a small output, and generate only a small income, and so this type of activity is only undermining the "written by us, for us" small community focus that has been established and is so valued by practitioners.

To conclude this section, current library provision is varied and sparse, and serves highly specialised audiences, such as researchers or society members, rather than general practitioners, who are not represented well in the population and therefore not represented well in public libraries collections, either. They are therefore much more likely to rely on the private market to purchase their own material. For practitioners, there is a preference for digital, with some illegal activity filling provision gaps and causing problems for authors.

Issues, Gaps and Complexities

In this section, the specific concerns highlighted within the descriptions of libraries above will be made clear. Firstly the issue of access – the

institutional libraries available require membership or patronage, or even acceptance or initiation into the group, before they can be accessed. While not uncommon in a theological library, for spiritual practices that emphasise the openness of membership of the clergy, where everyone automatically becomes their own priestess or priest, then this can be problematic, and, for practices that emphasise "folk" activity (i.e., working class, grass-roots activity), this "institutionalisation" is often strongly criticised and membership of this type is not a common undertaking.

Beyond this, personal libraries and archival material also exist, not just those that Ferguson, Price, and others have developed that now form more accessible collections, but those of individuals who within living memory have contributed to the development of these modern traditions. Not all of these are archived professionally, as the Frost example above, and it is much more common to have resources such as the Doreen Valiente Scrapbooks (hosted at *https://TheWica.co.uk*), where one individual is hosting scrapbooks created by Valiente (who is often called "the mother of modern witchcraft") on a personal Google Drive. Speaking as a practitioner, there are other similar collections that are not digitised, not online and not accessible like this scrapbook example, and so to have collections like this Google Drive is a significant improvement in itself. These offline and closed, personal archives have value in that they contain details of events, persons and other such historical details, but also of some private oath-bound practices and personal journeys that are essential in understanding how to approach this type of work. Considering that, the term *human digital memories* is useful here, denoting a kind of personal digital archive that may include smart device data and online postings alongside born digital or digitised versions of the custom rituals, journals, reflective writing and notes that make up a practitioner's personal and private group work. This is where modern traditions are preserved and developed, and where an individual might be given private access to in a personal capacity. This type of access to materials is much more common.

This is an excellent example of a complexity – while publishing endeavours, such as those of Regardie detailed above, have provided access to previously oath-bound information, this is not all of it, and indeed new and private practices are created all the time, as is encouraged. As identified within my previous information-seeking model (Fitzpatrick 2022a), considerations on personal approaches to saliency and secrecy significantly change how practitioners access and use information. With regard to important historical information

that could and should be open (rather than the very private personal journey), such as evidence of key figures knowing each other, or details of a person's initiatory lineage, accessing this information requires negotiating access to personal archives. This can be seen as a highly inequitable method, where it is possible for an individual to withhold vital information of this type in order to preserve outdated power structures. However, many of my peers, who place themselves differently within the saliency/secrecy dichotomy, would disagree with that.

Another issue highlighted above is shared with many contemporary and historically significant events: digital archiving of both digitised and born digital content. As explained in a recent article by Landis (2024), there is a risk of the increasing amounts of born-digital content requiring increased capacity and funding to ensure long term discoverability and accessibility. This expertise and capacity, and the funds to support it, is simply not there for minority spiritualities and religions, with current archives, such as that at the Museum of Witchcraft and Magick, being short-term, project-based or volunteer-driven efforts.

This clearly will have the effect of this modern history being lost, but is there really a benefit to ensuring it is not, for such a niche community? While Pagan and occult traditions have frequently been described as fast-growing (Miller 2024), this growth has not sustained itself, and was always statistically insignificant anyway, as Census 2021 data still shows the UK is less than 0.1% Pagan (Office for National Statistics 2022).

A further issue encountered is that of the use of Shadow Libraries (defined as digital methods of accessing copyrighted material illegally). Alternative spirituality practitioners rely on the private publishing system for access to texts, with a biblio-diverse ecosystem comprised of small, specialised publishers, such as Red Wheel/Weiser, and with many modern traditions owing their development to "for profit" book shops (Feraro 2020) and this private market. Up-to-the-minute practices have diverged – a kind of commodification driven by social media influencers has created a dichotomy of practitioners. On one hand, there are those who do not mind witchcraft being "sold" to them and enjoy the increased quality and availability of teaching that this brings, and who also value the aesthetic aspects of a marketised version of witchcraft as being inherently magickal (as in it is a form of enchantment). On the other hand, this is contrasted with those who reject capitalism and consumerism in all its forms for various religious reasons, including that their spiritual work occupies a separate space to their income-generating work, that it is unethical to make a profit

from what they are doing, and that the marketised version is very different to the "un-sanitised" practices they enjoy.

Some of these reasons have been examined by Ezzy (2001; 2006), who interestingly noted that "the contemporary Witchcraft movement has relatively little organised control over the content and dissemination of information about the movement" (Ezzy 2006, 16). This diversity of voices and unregulated authority is sometimes valued and sometimes not, as reflected in the "authority vs. anarchy" dichotomy within my information model (Fitzpatrick 2022a), but with any attempt at organisation being small-scale, excessively challenged and ultimately, as Ezzy stated, unsuccessful.

These polarised approaches were evidenced by Rinallo, Maclaran and Stevens (2016, 12–15), who highlighted that the rejection of marketisation is an older viewpoint, which can be said to be in line with the outdated power structures highlighted above, that in current times is widely understood to favour only those with the time and money enough to engage in "not for profit" activity. This cohort of practitioners who still reject the involvement of money in their religious lives retain the view that items needed for practice, such as information sources or books, tools and consumables such as candles, should be made, gifted or found in nature. Considering this, it follows that there is also a fourth way of obtaining what is needed without exchanging money – stealing. This, I believe, is what leads to the "librarian-myth" of occult books being the most often stolen from collections, a statement that has no evidence to support it, but that could be a very interesting angle for future investigation and research.

Adherents to Pagan and occult practices will often justify their use of Shadow Libraries using the same arguments presented in the Guerilla Open Access movement, founded by Aaron Swartz, while most of the time not being aware of its existence and arriving at these conclusions of their own volition. Bodo (2016, 2) described how Alexandra Elbakyan, the owner of Sci-Hub (a Shadow Library of academic papers), justified her actions as "a just fight against greedy corporate powers and those legal frameworks that enable such abuses." Although it is one thing to apply this to scholarly publishing, applying this to a peer network of small scale practitioner-authors within these religious practices, that Arburrow (2015) explained is "a mutually supportive tribe – what goes around comes around" has quite a different effect. There are no large publishing corporations, instead just people asking a fair profit for their work, and push-back against this is a hangover from more

economically stable times that enabled the luxury of rejecting the involvement of money in spiritual matters.

Instead of engaging in illegal activities with a "Robin Hood" argument that does not stand up to scrutiny, and considering the preference for digital information, a focus on counteracting the free misinformation available online is a more robust and ethical option. While it is well known in general society that this is increasing in all areas, some further complexities can be found because of the role information plays within Pagan and occult praxis as a whole. One key hallmark that unites much of these traditions is the emphasis on receiving knowledge from within yourself, through experience and through gnosis (in this context, defined as direct experience of the numinous). This makes the materials held in libraries a kind of second tier information source, whereas highly developed senses of intuition are the primary tier.

How would someone reference information gained in this way? How could this be fact-checked? How does this relate to misinformation? One attempt at answering this is the concept of unverified personal gnosis (UPG), referring to learning gained from these experiences that are not captured in any texts, which implies there is the opposite available – verified gnosis. This in practice is merely consensus, rendering the verified/unverified label redundant, and instead leaving just yourself and your own personal gnosis to navigate this set of knowledge, as it should be. How do we prevent this from becoming full-blown misinformation, whilst living a way of life that brings this to the fore? Alternative religion theological librarians, if such a profession were to exist, could work to provide some answers to these difficult and abstract questions.

One final consideration is thinking more about this assurance of quality and prevention of misinformation. More open practices, as I described in a recent conference paper "Principles of Open Source Witchcraft" (Fitzpatrick 2022b), that includes "transparency to civilians" (defined here as those who do not practise magick and witchcraft), can prevent individuals being scammed by allowing increased scrutiny. McLaughlin (2016) discussed practical mechanisms for achieving this through the case study of the now defunct Open Source Order of the Golden Dawn. Occultists already communicate in a kind of "public secret" language, as described by Bratich (2006), which is used as a mechanism to achieve this openness of knowledge between ourselves, where information is openly available, yet is coded in language and symbolism that only advanced practitioners will understand. It also has the beneficial effect of elevating experience over knowledge, as

we wish it to be, because by the very nature of our being – personal experience will always remain part of our private inner lives. A kind of built-in natural intellectual property protection, if you like.

To summarise this section, there are difficulties with access to closed yet important information sources within communities that have mixed relationships with secrecy. The exchange of money for anything, including books, is a controversial topic that remains so despite the small scale and circular nature of economies amongst practitioners, and, despite progressive movements towards the embracing of modern ethical marketplaces, that gives rise to misguided illegal activity. Finally, the preference for free and open digital information is hindered by the heavy reliance on personal experience to inform practices.

Solutions

I will continue this chapter by offering solutions to the issues outlined above that would improve the landscape of Theological Libraries for Alternative Spiritualities in Britain, and suggesting where ABTAPL could help to realise those.

At the current time, the Library of Avalon has an open call for "consultant librarians" which are described as "noted academics, writers and practitioners in the various fields relevant to our collections," (Library of Avalon) rather than professional librarians. However, this remains the most clear example of a request for help that ABTAPL may be able to help fulfil by linking the library with the librarian.

One other suggested solution is simply to make available and to secure more funding for research projects focussed on the creation of special collections of modern materials with public access, in addition to the historically significant ones described above, and to do this now while the potential for full living human digital memories is still possible. For a set of minority religions and spiritual practices, with limited appeal and an increase in a focus on STEM within all aspects of public funding, this is a near impossible task. Building political power through links with related aspects of practices, such as green economy initiatives (Paganism's "Earth Based Spirituality" focus could be linked), new ideas in enabling the psychological development of resilience and wellbeing (many modern Pagan practices are focussed on empowerment and healing), or creative solutions to misinformation and artificial intelligence (for example, occultists are well placed to

answer questions like "is AI sentient?") may be places to start, as well as emphasising the importance of these religious movements to British heritage. Could a partnership between APTAPL and interested heritage organisations strengthen a funding bid and work as a special project?

In the absence of research funding to make this possible, there are other ways in which creations of collections could be funded. One is to somehow mimic what is available, or is emerging as available, to academics within the private, small scale, practitioner-focussed publishing sector. What our communities need is a way for authors and publishers to make a living doing their work, while content is available to read (and publish) for free. To achieve this outside of academia, that has the backing of public money, may be overly ambitious, but developing infrastructures and models, such as those created by the significant Open Book Futures research project, are purposefully ensuring sustainability and encouraging scaling small in a way that is very close to the way things are and the things that are valued in this theological area. Again, can ABTAPL help to bridge this jump from the academic sector to the theological practitioner somehow, not even necessarily for alternative spiritualities, but in general, for all religious practitioners?

One key idea would be to create a kind of social enterprise, one that provides open access book publishing, subsidised by activities that already attract an income, such as ritual space hire, teaching and learning opportunities, selling supplies and "readings" (such as tarot cards) and borrowing other aspects from open access book models – a freemium model with print sales and a free digital copy would work well. The difficulty here would be maintaining authenticity in a community that is highly critical of enterprise of any type, and can have extreme attitudes towards it that are equally prevalent. It would require careful, highly clued-in leadership that is able to navigate the minefield of politics and public relations that an organisation like this would feature, and it would also require some way of incubating it as a "start-up." Even calling something like that a "start-up" feels socially dangerous for myself as an individual in communities like this.

Another idea that I know would be much better received is to build more upon the links between academia and practice. Within a small minority community this has already been achieved to a not insignificant extent, with many practitioners being aware of scholars in the field; for example, Ronald Hutton is well known and well loved. Beyond being known and loved though, there is opportunity for greater collaboration – what about moving beyond academic and

participant research relationships to a more "citizen science" participatory approach, for example? What about more dissemination work, one that lets practitioners know that research is accessible to them, not just through open access methods (even those as simple as asking a researcher for an author accepted manuscript personally) but through increased amounts of existing mechanisms such as trade books or public lectures. What about the availability of subsidised consultancy for leaders of groups, like other leaders have access to? Finally, what if researchers were allowed more freedom in their research practices? By this, I mean moving beyond projects that have clearly evidenced impact and the potential to attract funding, to real occult research – the research that you do inside yourself. As both librarians and theological experts, can ABTAPL advocate for and facilitate that?

From sharing my ideas on open source witchcraft, I have personally learned that these are still not just radical ideas within academia, but are even more radical and disruptive within Pagan and occult communities. For example, would full "transparency to civilians" require a removal of that "public secret" type of language and symbolism, and if so, is it not incredibly irresponsible to share that information with someone who is not "ready" and therefore would be harmed from knowing that? As with many things, and definitely within an incredibly diverse set of spiritualities where highly individualised practice is more than encouraged – it is required – it most definitely depends. Using my own practices and sense of intuition as a guide, my approach is to open the knowledge and provide "after care" if necessary, a form of spiritual asking for forgiveness, not permission, but I cannot say that this is the only, the right or the best approach – it is only the one that I use and that works for me in experience. Does ABTAPL have experience with this revealing of great religious truths, and if so, what would the advice be here?

Developing these values into practical ideas, increased transparency would look like: review websites of service providers (such as training courses) that allow for respectful discourse about experiences, better metadata and discoverability services for small scale publishers, scholars discussing personal beliefs and experiences more, or using plain everyday English to describe experiences and concepts. Some of this work has already begun with The Occult Library, a comprehensive website that contains curated metadata of occult materials encompassing books, periodicals, publishers, museum collections and more that has a variety of use cases. Can ABTAPL offer expertise for endeavours such as this, or facilitate those individuals who have

stepped up to create these resources in contacting others who have done similar with other religions?

There are many creative approaches to meet the information needs of adherents to these practices while navigating some of the key challenges. These mainly revolve around help securing funding, or help facilitating conversations between experts, that communities centring on more well represented religions may indeed already have solutions for.

Beyond Britain

Of course there is a British focus on this work, but I will finish with a short note about how British theological librarianship in this area differs from the rest of the world. Many countries where British-born alternative religions have been "exported", and also those where modern Pagan practices have developed, such as the reclaiming tradition in the US, have a first nation population maintaining a closed, indigenous religion. While I am loath to make the statement that there are similarities between indigenous religions that emphasise connection with nature with modern Earth-based spiritualities such as Paganism, there are arguments as presented above that consider the full breadth of the concept of indigeneity. Considering this, the CARE principles for indigenous data governance were created to promote the values of open data whilst allowing indigenous communities to retain sovereignty over their data. The principles take their acronym from the concepts of Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility and Ethics. While not created for use in the British context and it would be wrong to use them, could we be inspired and allow ourselves to be led by them, and create our own guiding principles, for alternative religions in a country that has no first nation population? This might allow sovereignty over the personal and authentic nature of practices to be retained whilst some of the solutions described above are developed.

Conclusion

Within this chapter I have explained exactly why there is a pressing need for the expertise of professional librarians and archivists in the practitioner communities of alternative spiritualities. In particular, the needs are the ever present issues of funding, the new and innovative

developments within open access and digital archiving, and facilitating conversations that might lead to the establishment of new initiatives. The main hurdle to achieving this is providing a method of accessing this expertise, in the absence of collective power within a minority community, and without a clear mechanism or guidance to providing funding streams that meet the disparate values of adherents.

Beyond what librarians could achieve within this theological area, there is another critical need here – that of skilled leadership of Pagan and occult groups to build the political power necessary to secure funding and to build the sustainable social enterprises that will provide the services missing. In a hyper-critical area of religious practice, where institutionalisation and hegemony are actively resisted wherever possible, this is unlikely to happen, and could be argued, would stray too far from its roots of providing alternative counter-religions. Providing a solution to that problem will require much more research and development, and until then, we will have to do without true theological libraries for alternative spiritualities.

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Conclusion

70 Years of ABTAPL and into the Future

HANNIE RILEY

As ABTAPL marks its 70th Anniversary, the number 70 is not just a number but it holds rich meaning in both Confucian and Judaeo-Christian traditions.

In Confucian thought, the number 70 symbolises the age of true inner harmony. Confucius famously said in the *Analects of Confucius* (2:4), "At seventy, I could follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right" (Confucius and Waley 2005, 88). This signifies the attainment of complete moral freedom, where one's actions naturally align with what is right and appropriate. Age 70 is thus viewed not merely as longevity but as the height of ethical maturity and self-integration.

In Judeo-Christian tradition, 70 carries profound symbolic weight. It represents completeness and the nations of the world, as seen in Genesis 10, which lists 70 descendants of Noah who became the founders of various nations after the flood. The number 70 is derived by counting the individual names of sons, grandsons and great grandsons listed throughout Genesis 10. In Exodus, 70 elders are appointed to assist Moses, representing shared wisdom and leadership (24:1 and 24:9) and the Spirit (Numbers 11:16–17).

It is a symbol of leadership, fullness, and the flowering of character and responsibility. It marks a threshold where deep experience becomes a source of guidance for others and a legacy for the future.

ABTAPL celebrates its 70th anniversary, a remarkable milestone that places it among the oldest theological library associations in the world. Its history predates even that of our European federal association, BETH (Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie) with their foundation in 1973. Few other associations in our field have endured for so long, withstanding both challenges and triumphs. ABTAPL stands today with a legacy of leadership, resilience, and maturity.

We especially pay tribute to those who have poured their sweat and blood into the life of this association. Without their dedication and sacrifice, this legacy would not have been possible.

Admittedly, I cannot claim that this anniversary celebration will be grander than those of the past, for as we leave the Covid-19 pandemic years behind, we continue to find ourselves swimming against strong currents which call for continued perseverance and innovation by our members. The perseverance and labour of our members in recent years have been no less heroic.

The number of theological institutions is dwindling (James 2023, 24). Where theological libraries do survive, they are often absorbed into broader humanities faculties, losing their distinctive identity and subject expertise in the process (James 2023, 26). Meanwhile, the legacy of colonialism has cast a shadow over many book collections (Green 2022).

This is not a challenge unique to theology. Across the library and information sector, subject specialising is diminishing. Functional specialists such as reader services, digital support, research services, and reference management have gained popularity, understandably, given the demands of today's technological and research environments (Hoodless and Pinfield 2018, 345). However, the value of subject-specific expertise is increasingly overlooked, and our professionalism is often underappreciated. Many of us feel as though we are fighting to preserve our corner.

In spite of all these challenges, we must be cautious not to overgeneralise local trends. While theological librarianship may be in decline in some places, it is thriving in others. My sense of a less bright future for theological libraries is rooted mostly from a Western perspective. In contrast to the Western world, the global picture is far brighter and more hopeful. For example, despite the war in Ukraine, the demand for theological education there remains strong (Riley 2024, 203). As

churches and Christianity continue to find new voices and expressions in the Global South (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing 2020) libraries to support theological education are springing up there.

From its inception, ABTAPL has always had an international perspective (Powles 2022, 520). With this mindset, as Chair I have been committed to two clear agendas: open access and greater international engagement – the last of which is enshrined in our 2019 aims:

The aims of the Association shall be: i) to promote the study of library information science especially in the areas of theology, philosophy and cognate subjects; ii) to facilitate the work of theological and/or philosophical libraries and librarians in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland; iii) to promote professional contacts with similar organisations throughout the world; iv) to advance the education of the public by promoting the work of libraries, especially in the areas of theology and/or philosophy (ABTAPL 2019).

To achieve this, we are taking bold steps towards becoming global citizens with this publication. It is one expression of our vision, documenting our history and present state in an open access format for global readership.

We also hope to make the *ABTAPL Bulletin* openly available through Atla's Open Press platform, making it searchable and accessible worldwide as well as on our current platform via Theology on the Web. Our e-book collection is discoverable. We are also in the process of digitising our archive materials.

To achieve this, we are deepening our collaboration with Atla and BETH on open access initiatives and have extended our partnerships to KTLA (Korean Theological Library Association).

Training remains another key priority. We are currently in discussions with Atla and ANZTLA to collaborate in developing manuals to replicate the *Guidelines for Theological Libraries* (Kerry and Cornell 1999), recognising that our accumulated skills and specialist knowledge can benefit new theological librarians and will continue to offer some online training sessions to BETH European colleagues.

The next decade will be rich with possibilities. Advancements in technology will support our mission and enable us to communicate and collaborate more effectively across borders.

As has always been the case, our history bears witness to it. We approach our future with humility, respect, and cultural sensitivity. This is our strength as an association. This is what sets us apart. And this is what we will continue to cultivate as we support theological libraries around the world to achieve our constitution.

As ABTAPL reaches its 70th anniversary in 2026, we pause to remember and honour the legacy of those who came before us, those whose vision, collegiality, and perseverance shaped ABTAPL into the thriving and collaborative network it is today.

ABTAPL Chairs, 1956–2026

YEAR	NAME	INSTITUTION
1956	Rev. A. Thomas	Dr. Williams' Library
1958	Rev. F. Courtney, S.J.	Heythrop College Library
1959	Mr. R. L. Collison	British Broadcasting Corporation Library
1960	Miss E. M. Edmonston	Sion College Library
1961	Mr. K. Garside	Kings College Library
1966	Rev. F. Courtney, S.J.	Heythrop College Library
1975	John Howard	New College Library, Edinburgh
1983	John Creasey	Dr. Williams' Library
1989	Margaret Ecclestone	Partnership House Library
1992	Judith Powles	Spurgeon's College
2008	Alan Linfield	London School of Theology
2014	Carol Reekie	Cambridge Theological Federation
2018	Rachel Campion	Luther King House
2019	Sally Gibbs	Regents Theological College
2020	Hannie Riley	Wycliffe Hall College

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Contributors

Lydia Collins holds an MA in information and library management, and she is the librarian at Belfast School of Theology (BST), having moved from the school library sector nine years ago. At BST she has: developed the library's use of online resources to include an increasing collection of e-books and interdisciplinary resources to support the school's curriculum; introduced security measures to protect the library's print resources; and is currently researching the background of BST from its beginnings as a missionary training college to the present day, with the intention of collating it all into a comprehensive history.

Joy Conkey, BEd., MSc., MCLIP, is librarian of the Gamble Library, Union Theological College, Belfast. She has been librarian there for seven years, previously serving as deputy librarian since 2013. Joy completed a master degree in information and library studies at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, and won the CILIPS Annual Student Award for being the highest achieving information and library studies student in Scotland. She became a chartered librarian in 2016 and has subsequently revalidated several times. From 2016 to 2019, Joy served as secretary of the CILIP Ireland Committee.

Joanne Fitzpatrick, MSc, works on the Open Research Team at Lancaster University Library, with experience of open access monographs, research data management and bibliometrics, and is a former public librarian. She is also a lifelong occultist with experience in Wicca, Chaos current magick, and Thelema. Her past work on information behaviour models within her religious area has been published in *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* and presented at the Magickal Women Conference, and her research interests are in the area of defining both non-rational occult and divergent approaches to information science and leadership.

Michael Gale, MLib, MCLIP, is the librarian at The Queen's Foundation in Birmingham, having previously worked at Aston University, the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, and the University of Birmingham. He has been at Queen's since 2002 and served on the ABTAPL committee between 2006 and 2017. He represents Common Awards librarians on the Networked Learning Advisory Group, which advises the Ministry Development Team of the Church of England.

Carlos Garcia-Jane is a librarian at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, a freelance indexer, and the bibliographer of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. He holds two master degrees – MScEcon in Information and Library Studies (Aberystwyth University) and MA Buddhist Studies (University of South Wales) – and is currently a PhD candidate in Buddhist Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Carlos is also the reviews editor of the *Buddhist Studies Review* and sits on the board of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies. His previous research includes a survey of Buddhist Libraries in the UK and a history of Buddhist textual practices and of reading habits of contemporary Buddhists.

Christine Love-Rodgers, MA, MA, FCLIP, SFHEA (she/her), leads a team of Academic Support Librarians supporting the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science at the University of Edinburgh. For the last twenty years, she has been the academic support librarian for the School of Divinity at New College Library, Edinburgh. She is currently deputy chair of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL) and also serves on the editorial team for the *BETH Bulletin*, published by Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie (BETH).

Hannie Riley is the chair of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries and has been working for the University of Oxford, UK since 2006, starting in the Philosophy and Theology Faculties Library and now at Wycliffe Hall as the college librarian. Hannie is also the head librarian of Yarnton Manor Lanier Theological Library near Oxford and the vice-president of BETH. Hannie holds an MSc in library science from City University of London, an MA in education, and a BA in psychology from Kyungnam University, South Korea.

Jane Sinnett-Smith, PhD, is the librarian at the Cambridge Theological Federation, an ecumenical partnership of twelve teaching and research institutes, with responsibilities for ten physical libraries, a digital library, and heritage special collections. Her PhD examined writing about relics in medieval hagiography, with a particular focus on manuscripts as sacred objects. Her research interests include medieval and early modern book history, the materiality of books, and classification and cataloguing in both historical and contemporary contexts. This latter interest is fuelled by the seven different classification schemes in use within CTF libraries.

Judith (Judy) Smith-Blow (formerly Powles) was librarian/archivist at Spurgeon's College, London, from 1985 until her retirement in 2014. Prior to Spurgeon's, she worked in academic libraries at Royal Holloway College and the University of Exeter where she was subject librarian for theology, the classics, Italian and French. This was followed by a post as chief cataloguer for the London Borough of Southwark. She was elected onto ABTAPL's Committee in 1988 and became ABTAPL Chair from 1991 until 2008. Since her retirement from Spurgeon's College, she has been serving as a trustee of the CILIP Benevolent Fund.

Alison Turner is part-time archivist at Liberal Judaism. She earned an honours degree in librarianship at the Polytechnic of North London and began her career as a Jewish librarian at the *Jewish Chronicle* newspaper library. She was brought up in Modern Orthodox Judaism but found she preferred Progressive Judaism and joined North London Progressive Synagogue in Stamford Hill, where Rabbi Marcia Plumb uttered the fateful words, "And what do you do for a living?" and Alison became the synagogue librarian. This led her to become a very part-time archivist for Liberal Judaism, creating and maintaining records for the headquarters, while advising nearly 40 communities. Meanwhile she

was a cataloguer at a London Borough for 20 years and a Londoner for over 50 years, moving to Hereford in 2012. She was librarianship's first Equal Opportunities Officer in the UK, for the Association of Assistant Librarians, and worked with the Library Association.

Gudrun Warren, PhD, MCLIP, is librarian and curator at Norwich Cathedral, where she is responsible for the collections of modern theology and rare books, and also for the cathedral's inventory of items of historical, archaeological, artistic and architectural interest. She has served on the committees of the Cathedral Archives, Libraries and Collections Association (CALCA), the Historic Libraries Forum, and ABTAPL. Her PhD was on angels in medieval literature, and she has edited a book on the windows of Norwich Cathedral.

Anna Williams is the librarian at St Padarn's Institute (formerly St Michael's College) where she has worked for 25 years, strengthening and developing her long-standing commitment to theological education and information services. Anna is a Chartered Member of CILIP (MCLIP) and an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (AFHEA). She holds an MSc Econ in library and information studies from Aberystwyth University, a BA in theology from St David's University College, Lampeter, and a postgraduate certificate in education. She is passionate about supporting students and promoting digital literacy within theological education.