

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

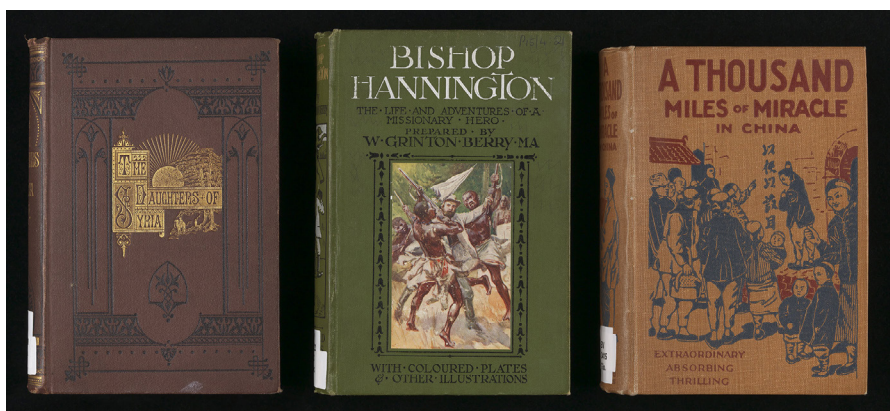


Image 2: World Christianity titles from New College Library collections: Bishop Hannington: The Life and Adventures of a Missionary Hero (1910); A Thousand Miles of Miracle in China (1906); The Daughters of Syria: A Narrative of Efforts by Mrs. Bowen Thompson for the Evangelization of the Syrian Females (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 Episcopal 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 Innerpeffer 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

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