CHAPTER 11

Theological Libraries for Alternative Spiritualities

JOANNE FITZPATRICK

In 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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