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## "The Books belonging to the Church in the library...": Partnership-working for the Future of New College Library, Edinburgh<sup>[1]</sup>

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"The books belonging to the Church in the Library..." is a phrase taken from the 1962 Memorandum of Agreement between the University of Edinburgh and the Church of Scotland. They refer to the collections of New College Library, the Divinity Library of the University of Edinburgh. This article will explore the relationship between the Church of Scotland and the University of Edinburgh and how these have shaped the development of New College Library.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **The University of Edinburgh, the School of Divinity, and New College Library**

The University of Edinburgh opened in 1583, following Bishop Robert Reid's bequest of funds to found a college of higher learning in Edinburgh in his will of 1558 (Edinburgh, Our History 2016). While the University at its foundation functioned

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[1] This paper is an updated and revised version of: Love-Rodgers, Christine. 2018. "'The books belonging to the Church in the Library...'" Renewing the relationship between Church and University." *Bulletin of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries* 25 (1): 9-13. <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/31462>.

largely as a college for the training of clergy in the Church of Scotland, it was the secular foundation, led by the Town Council of Edinburgh which played a unique role in its governance (Edinburgh, History 2023).

The University of Edinburgh is now a world-leading university with nearly 50,000 students. The School of Divinity itself is a leading provider of theological education in the UK and was ranked 1st in Scotland and 5th in the UK for Theology and Religious Studies in the most recent Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021), (Edinburgh, School 2022). The School is also ranked in the world's top 20 universities for Theology, Divinity and Religious Studies (QS World University Rankings by Subject 2023). It is one of the centres for Ministry training for the Church of Scotland, and also provides CPD and short courses for ministers and lay church members.

New College Library is one of ten University of Edinburgh Libraries and is one of the UK's largest theological libraries. It supports the School of Divinity and the wider University, with over 250,000 print items occupying five floors. This includes nearly 3000 linear metres of Heritage Collections material. Students and staff also have access to extensive electronic resources, with course readings available via online resources or reading lists.

## Landmarks in New College Library History

New College Library was born out of church division and disruption. The Disruption of 1843 was a schism or division within the Church of Scotland, when over a third of the ministers in the established Church broke away over the issue of the Church's relationship with the State, to form the Free Church of Scotland (Brown n.d.). It came at the end of a bitter conflict within the established Church, and had high effects not only within the Church, but also upon Scottish culture and civic life. This split was replicated in the University's Divinity Faculty.

Figure 1. Disruption Brooch, c.1843. ©University of Edinburgh. The brooch was made for the wives of the ministers who supported the Disruption to wear as a token of their support



Immediately following these events, in May 1843, Rev. David Welsh (former University professor of Ecclesiastical History) addressed the Free Church General Assembly to invite the foundation of New College Library. It is important to note that this was at a point when the new Free Church was still a protest movement. Worshippers in the new denomination had no church buildings of their own and were meeting in fields and temporary accommodation – even on ships. David Welsh was passionate about the importance of the library for training ministers in the new Free Church, and he was the first New College Librarian (1843); in fact, the Library began in his house. David Welsh was a charismatic fundraiser and donations seeker for the Free Church and New College Library, and also a notable antiquarian book scholar.



Figure 2. Free Church ministers, 1843. Image from Hill & Adamson Calotypes Collection ©University of Edinburgh. David Welsh appears at the lectern

Moving forward nearly 90 years, following the reunion of the Church of Scotland and United Free Church in 1929, the two main centres of theological learning in Edinburgh – New College and the University’s Divinity Faculty – came together. However, while University teaching had been united, work still remained to physically bring the libraries of these two centres together. A landmark agreement was made in 1962; at that point the library buildings and the books within them were transferred into the management of the University in a Memorandum of Agreement with the Church of Scotland (Scotland, Church, of. 1962, 243). The library collections acquired prior to 1962 remained in the ownership of the Church of Scotland. Post 1962, all books acquired for New College Library have been purchased by and belong to the University of Edinburgh. Access rights for ministers from both the Church of Scotland and the remaining Free Church were preserved.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, New College Library adopted online cataloguing and later Library of Congress classification, in line with the University of Edinburgh Library. Between 2006-2016, New College Library benefited from the Funk Donation Special Collections Projects. Gifted by Dr Robert Funk, this donation provided \$1,000,000 of investment for Special Collections at New College Library. Projects focused on Cataloguing (35,000+ items), Preservation and Security (Love-Rodgers 2016).

## 21st Century Partnership Working

In recent years there has been a renewed focus on the partnership with the Church of Scotland, as the University's understanding of the importance of the New College Library collections and buildings has increased (the Funk projects being a contributory factor to this). New developments included revised Library Access for Church workers, a new Addendum to the 1962 Agreement, and the New College Library Project.

The 1962 agreement had enshrined the rights of active and retired ministers from the Church of Scotland and Free Church to access and borrow the print collections of New College Library. However this presented some anomalies within University library management. Library access was normally granted to all ten University Library sites, not just one. No public information was available about this



Figure 3. Sign for New College, combining the Church of Scotland's Burning Bush emblem with the arms of the University of Edinburgh.  
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historic arrangement, leading to questions from church ministers in other denominations about why they did not have this special entitlement. Our library helpdesk staff work as part of the larger flexible team across all library helpdesks, which supports staffing cover in sickness and holiday absence. This meant that staff covering at New College Library, who were used to other library sites, were unused to New College Library's unique arrangements. Unlike in 1962, it was no longer an environment where, if the Moderator of the Church of Scotland walked through the library door, library staff would automatically recognise them. The Church itself had also changed, with a much wider spectrum of roles and employees who were interested in using the library, from Parish Assistants to Youth and Families Workers, not just Parish ministers.

After discussion with the Church, we took a paper to the University Library Committee in 2017 which clarified and enhanced library access arrangements for ministers, students, and employees of the Church of Scotland and Free Church. This established free borrowing access to all University sites for these groups, on the production of ID proving Church employment. For the first time, these arrangements were then made transparent on a web page (Edinburgh, Church, 2023), increasing visibility, and they were also promoted in the Church of Scotland's magazine *Life & Work* (Love-Rodgers 2017, 29).

In 2019 we were able to take forward a much larger piece of work to develop an Addendum to the 1962 Agreement. This was necessary due to:

- Changes in the library environment – the 1962 agreement was formulated at a very different time, before the growth of digital collections;
- Collection growth – the New College Library holdings have matched the expansion in student numbers and research in Divinity, to the point at which the building is effectively full;
- Digitisation – there is a growing expectation that the collections will be available online, but at present, only a very small fraction of NCL holdings have been digitised (<1%). A programme of digitisation for New College material required more clarity on ownership, rights, and licensing issues.

Developing the Addendum was a significant piece of work involving numerous meetings between University, Church, and Library staff, and finally the University and Church legal teams. Changes include clarification of ownership and procedures for withdrawals, collection loans, temporary relocation of collections, and collections digitisation. It was legally ratified by the Church of Scotland General Assembly, May 2019 (Church of Scotland, Decision 2019, 9-10).

## **New College Library Project 2020-2023**

Not long after the 2019 Addendum, we were notified by the University's Estates department of a major New College Fire Asset Protection Project. Developed in the context of the major fires at the Glasgow School of Art Library and at Notre Dame, the building's work required us to fully decant all New College Library Collections. In January 2020, New College Library's General Collections moved to 40 George Square, remaining fully accessible to students and staff. Heritage Collections were more complex (and also delayed by COVID), but later in 2020, the New College Heritage Collections were moved to multiple locations including deep storage.

The overall budget for the New College Fire Asset Protection was approximately £8.3 million and covered extensive building improvement works to the whole New College site. From this, £903,000 was allocated to the Library move project. These project budget numbers are evidence of the significant investment in these Church buildings by the University. In Table 1, you can also see the sheer size of the New College Library collections in linear metres – approaching 7 kilometres of materials in total. The Library Project budget covered staffing, contractors, materials, and storage costs for all library move and associated conservation work. Library building improvements included a new water sprinkler fire protection system, disabled lift access, roof repairs, asbestos removal, and a relocated Heritage Collections reading room.

New College Library reopened in its original building at Mound Place on 11 September 2023. These Library moves were made in challenging conditions including sharing access routes with the Edinburgh Festival, on-site building contractors, the University's Welcome Week, and normal semester-time library users. The return of New College Library collections is still a work in progress.

Heritage Collections moves, originally due to take place in July 2023, were paused due to significant and unexpected high humidity levels and further building assessment and remedial actions have been taking place. We are now working on the full return of the New College Heritage Collections in 2023-24. Reflecting on the steps towards successful partnership-working that have made these projects possible, a key aspect was the foundation of good relationships built over the years that made difficult conversations possible. The updated Memorandum of Understanding in 2019 was helpful for both Church and University, as a reminder of New College collections, their complexities, and their legal standing. We have worked, where possible, to simplify complexities, such as library access for ministers, and ensure that what the Church receives is not only just as good as, but hopefully better than, previous arrangements.

Collection	Linear metres moved
General Collections	4,070
Rare Books	2,629
Archives	265
Artworks and museum objects	n/a

Table 1. New College Library holdings in meterage

During the years of the New College Library project, representatives from both the Church and the School of Divinity sat side by side with Library staff on project boards, able to have direct engagement with the project. In the closing stages of the project, weekly face-to-face meetings have supported an honest conversation about project progress (and delays) and have led to the proposal of a New College Library Strategy group meeting as an established University committee. Finally, regular communications by email and letter with the School and the Church have helped to keep everyone in the picture.

## The Future

Through this partnership-working between University and Church, we believe we are enabling New College Library to meet the challenges it is facing for the future.



Part funded by the Church of Scotland, we have already begun to digitise New College Library's collections for use by scholars, churchmen, and public alike (University of Edinburgh University of Edinburgh collections n.d.). To give just one example, New College Library holds a comprehensive collection of the Free Church newspaper *The Witness*. Edited by Hugh Millar, it is part of New College's unique story as a powerhouse of religious protest, renewal, and scholarship, and so digitising it will preserve this and enable interaction with the paper for future generations.



Figure 4. : Millar, Hugh. (1843) *The Witness*, 20 May, Front page. Available at: <https://images.is.ed.ac.uk/>

Once our Heritage Collections have fully returned to the building, we look forward to a newly reconfigured Heritage Collections reading room enabling teaching with collections. This will further support the Library to develop New College Collections outreach to the Church community and beyond.

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