
PANEL PRESENTATIONS

Introducing the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries

Christine Love-Rodgers, College Lead (Library Academic Support) CAHSS and Academic Support Librarian for Divinity & Edinburgh Futures Institute

ABSTRACT In this brief survey of ABTAPL's activities, Christine Love-Rodgers, Deputy Chair of ABTAPL introduces herself and her role in ABTAPL, with a reflection on how she ended up in her current position. She outlines the organization and governance of ABTAPL and the current nature of its membership. One of ABTAPL's most important activities is its annual conference, which includes library visits and conference dinners as well as conferences sessions. ABTAPL members benefit from publications including the ABTAPL Bulletin, co-operative services including an interlibrary loan system, and mentoring, training and grant programs. Christine acknowledges the challenges that ABTAPL members face, including diminishing budgets and reducing student numbers, which may lead to library closures of mergers. But there are opportunities also for ABTAPL to develop and to collaborate with Atla, including online training, open access publishing and potentially 'twinning' US and UK libraries to learn from each other.

LIBRARY & ASSOCIATION ROLES

I work at the University of Edinburgh Library, where I have a management role as College Lead for library Academic Support and I

have also been Academic Support Librarian for the School of Divinity for twenty years. During this time, I have worked closely with New College Library, one of the largest theological libraries in the United Kingdom. Currently, I am Deputy Chair of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL). I am also working on the Atla Open Press book project, *Theological Libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland*.

My library has a long history of involvement with ABTAPL. I was introduced to the association when I arrived at New College Library in 2004, but family responsibilities kept me from being closely involved for a while, although I did attend some conferences. My employer supported me to attend and present at the BETH conference in Cordoba in 2023, where I spent time with Anna James and Marni Thurm from ABTAPL. When Hannie Riley was looking for an editor to join the team for the *Theological Libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland* book project, Anna James recommended me. Six months later and I was on the committee and elected Deputy Chair. I guess I was approached at the right time, to get involved on the right kind of project for me.

ASSOCIATION ORGANIZATION & GOVERNANCE

ABTAPL is the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries, an organization formed to help those working in libraries containing theological, philosophical and related materials by sharing information and experience.

ABTAPL provides for its members an informal network for consultation, advice and support for both individuals and institutions.

ABTAPL is governed by a committee, which includes a Chair, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer, plus other elected members. The committee is limited to a maximum of ten individuals. It meets a minimum of twice per year and conducts business by email. Our Annual General Meeting is held as part of the Spring Conference.

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

The association is made up of personal, retired, and institutional members, with a fourth category of complementary memberships. A chart included below from the April 2025 secretary report details the number of members in ABTAPL from 2017 through June 2025. In June 2025, there were five personal-type memberships, 16 retired-type memberships, 77 institutional memberships, and 18 marked as complementary.

Table 1: ABTAPL Membership

ABTAPL membership secretary's report 2025-04-06 – Keith Lang

Here is a table of the membership figures over the eight years held in ABTAPL's membership database.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (at 6-4-25)
(complementary)	0	1	19	19	19	19	19	18	18
personal	5	7	10	11	11	10	12	6	5
retired	11	13	17	18	18	17	14	20	16
institutional	56	62	93	96	95	95	84	80	77
Total (comp.)	72(0)	82(1)	120(19)	125(19)	124(19)	122(19)	110(19)	106(18)	98(18)

The 'complementary' memberships represent institutions to which the ABTAPL bulletin are sent most of which are deposit libraries around the world in order to potentially raise the profile of the association.

ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

ABTAPL hosts an annual residential conference, usually in the spring before Easter. The location moves each year to reflect the membership of ABTAPL across the United Kingdom and Ireland. It is predominantly attended by members, but we do offer non-member rates.

Conference Activities Include:

- Library Visits
- CPD Sessions
- Open Forum / Panel Sessions
- Teach Meet Sessions
- Dinners and Pre-Dinner Drinks
- Conference Lecture

ASSOCIATION BENEFITS & PROGRAMS

Below is a list of ABTAPL benefits and programs with brief descriptions and/or web links to learn more:

- ABTAPL Union List of Periodicals: <https://abtapljournals.wordpress.com/>
- Directory of Members: <https://www.abtapl.org.uk/resources/directory-of-institutional-members/>
- ABTAPL Guidelines for Theological libraries: Available online to registered members only
- Inter-Library Loans: <https://abtapljournals.wordpress.com/request-an-article/>
- CPD e-Book Library: <https://www.abtapl.org.uk/learning-and-development/cpd-ebooks/>
- ABCHAT: Monthly online meetings on a topic to share experience and collaborate
- Mentoring, Training, and Grant Programs: Intended to support international partner libraries (e.g. in Ukraine)

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The top three challenges currently facing our membership are stretched budgets, diminishing student numbers, and library closures or mergers with larger libraries (e.g. Dr. Williams' Library and Ushaw College Library).

The top two challenges currently facing the association are decreasing membership and lower attendance at events.

Some of the identified opportunities ABTAPL has noted for possible collaborations with Atla and its members include the following:

- Online training in the form of sharing experience via online communication/meetings
- Open access publishing e.g. *Theological Libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland* volume due in 2026
- Potential for 'twinning' (or pairing) of libraries to learn from similar and different libraries

To learn more about ABTAPL, visit our association website: <https://www.abtapl.org.uk/>.