

Andrew Finlay Walls and Libraries¹

By Margaret M Acton

Andrew Finlay Walls (1928-2021) was an unusual academic: theologian, Africanist and pioneer in the field of World Christianity. He was as often to be found preaching in small Methodist churches as lecturing at Yale, Princeton and Harvard. In addition he served as a local councillor in Aberdeen, was chair of the Council of Museums and Galleries in Scotland and in select settings acted under the stage name of Finlay Anderson. This article concentrates on his library and documentation activities, particularly his work in Edinburgh as where for 19 years I worked with him in the Library of the Centre for the Study of Christianity on the Non-Western World (CSCNWW), now known, since 2009, as the Centre for the Study of World Christianity (CSWC).

He studied at Oxford specialising in Patristics, thereafter he spent five years as librarian at the recently founded Tyndale House, Cambridge, a research centre for evangelical Biblical scholarship. There he set about building up the library, was responsible for stabilising the finances of the new study centre and served as secretary to the Tyndale Fellowship. This laid an important foundation for his work in building up collections in Africa and later in the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World and in encouraging the research interests of others.

Then there was the life changing decision to go to Sierra Leone to teach at Fourah Bay College, it was there that he realised:

that I, while happily pontificating on...second-century Christian literature, was actually living in a second-century church...The experience changed this academic for life; instead of trying to extrapolate from that ancient corpus of literature and apply it, I began to understand the second-century material in the light of all the religious events going on around me.²

Five years in Sierra Leone was followed by four years in Nsukka, Nigeria setting up a Department of Religion in the new University. During this period he realised that there were substantial quantities of neglected church records which he proceeded to gather together. Tragically these were destroyed in the Nigerian Civil War and he talked with feeling of having walked on their ashes. The outbreak of war resulted in a move to Scotland. Firstly he taught at the University of Aberdeen in Church History, then set up the Religious Studies department and in addition created the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World. It was to this Centre that numerous postgraduate students were drawn, many of them from Africa such as Kwame Bediako, others with an interest in Africa. In 1987 the Centre moved to Edinburgh, Aberdeen

University had a financial crisis, the Religious Studies department was closed and Andrew Walls was seriously ill and required a triple heart bypass. When he came to Edinburgh he was thought to be terminally ill but the Divinity Faculty in Edinburgh with James Mackey as dean offered to house the Centre. There he worked firstly as director and then and later as curator of the Centre's collections. Much of his time was spent teaching elsewhere. Akrofi-Christaller Institute, later University, in Ghana was frequently on his itinerary, there were regular visits to Yale with the Day Missions Library a major attraction as well as spells at Princeton and Harvard and innumerable visits elsewhere in the World.

One consistent theme in the tributes paid to Andrew Walls was his humility but one aspect that was rather overlooked was his lifelong commitment to libraries and documentation. I would see this commitment to library and bibliographical work as linked to his humility and desire to serve others. If the subject area of World Christianity was to grow then it needed the foundational resources and he set about acquiring these and just as importantly promoting them. His material resources were tiny but much was achieved.

There were five distinct areas. Firstly building up a library, secondly collecting archive resources, thirdly bibliography, fourthly publishing, fifthly projects to provide or help the survival of resources elsewhere. All of these are interconnected.

The CSCNWW Library

I don't think the library ever had a budget so nothing was bought, everything was donated, much of course was donated by Professor Walls himself; other items came from students, colleagues, friends, academic visitors. By 2007 the collection comprised around 14 000 monographs including many rare pamphlets and 4000 periodical runs. Aside from the actual collecting Professor Walls, very substantially helped by Doreen Walls, did a considerable amount of the day to day work, often late at night after students and other library users had left. One of my enduring images was of him at the top of a ladder shelving periodicals with Mrs Walls hovering at floor level passing things up to him. It certainly would not have been an activity that his cardiologist would have recommended. He refused for many years to use computers and his attachment to the physical worlds of pen and paper was demonstrated by the endless writing of index cards, while Liz Leitch and I catalogued the library online he insisted on writing index cards himself and Mrs Walls accessioned all the journals. He spoke with feeling of having once been invited to a card burning party, I think possibly at Princeton.

Some of this material has been absorbed into New College Library; much of it now forms the basis of the Andrew F. Walls Centre at Liverpool Hope University.³

Archives

His experience in Nigeria did not deter him from archive collecting. I think in Aberdeen this started slightly accidentally. He was offered the diaries of George Clarke, CIM missionary to Yunnan and Shansi because no one else was interested in taking them. This was in 1969; from then on the Centre acquired a reputation for being one of the few places interested in collecting missionary archives. One obvious source was the Church of Scotland, much of that material was already in the National Library of Scotland but very rare periodicals and monographs were donated to us and memorably the lantern slide collection. This was stored in 121's attic; the lift doesn't reach the attic and lantern slides with their layers of glass and lead are extremely heavy. Professor Walls carried absurd quantities of these downstairs and was very reluctant to accept my help. I worried about another heart attack. When we got them back to the library he was delighted to find that the haul included the only photo he had seen of Mary Slessor wearing a hat. Probably the most significant collection and certainly the largest related to the Himalayas. A chance (or providential) meeting with Cindy Perry at Wheaton resulted in the Nepal Church history archives coming to Edinburgh. In addition archives from the United Mission to Nepal, The International Nepal Fellowship and the Central Asia Fellowship followed. Betty Young of UMN cared for these collections which were a unique and probably the most complete record of the growth of Christianity in a country both from national/indigenous perspective and from that of the missionaries. Again as far as I know no other institution was interested in collecting and housing this material.⁴

One factor that helped was that Andrew Walls was a devout Christian and individual donors and institutions were comfortable with entrusting their materials to someone who sympathised with and valued their contents.

Bibliography

Another unsung role of Andrew Walls was as editor of *The International Review of Mission Bibliography of Mission Studies*. Again I think this started rather accidentally in 1972, the previous editor of the bibliography asked him if he would take this on as he was the only person who regularly or indeed ever suggested items for inclusion. This entailed indexing some 300-400 items, monographs and journal articles in a number of different languages every three months, having it typed up, proofreading it and sending it (usually at the last minute) to Geneva for publication. This was work that he undertook for decades, work that served the scholarly community and brought no rewards but he saw it as

important enough to devote huge amounts of time to it. This work only ceased in 2010 when BlackwellWiley took over the publication and refused permission for us to retain copyright of the bibliography.

Publications

Andrew Walls founded four periodicals; of these only one survives, *The Journal of Religion in Africa*, founded in 1967. From the library point of view the most important one was the *Bulletin of the Scottish Institute of Missionary Studies*, this was exchanged for other journals enabling the CSCNWW library to build up its periodical holdings, in addition journals and monographs arrived to be indexed in IRM.

Projects

These had the aim of promoting and preserving the collected materials in the CSCNWW collections and in other institutions. The Cumulative Bibliography of the International Review of Mission aimed to make it easier to find printed materials. The Africa Christianity Project involved creating a bibliography, scanning materials and sharing resources among partner institutions in Africa. The Yale-Edinburgh Conference and associated missions list was founded in 1992 by Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh.⁵ The Conference always included a documentation session and was used as a platform to support the Day Library at Yale. The list has been an invaluable means of spreading information on bibliographical resources and information.

Legacy

Finally Andrew Finlay Walls's legacy is in the students and others whose lives he mentored and encouraged. It is also in the physical survival and promotion of materials that otherwise might have been lost or languished unknown.

References

- ¹ This paper was originally given as part of a CSWC Seminar Commemorating Andrew Walls (1928-2021) on the 5th of October 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74fMUJ9Votg>
For other tributes see <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/august/andrew-walls-world-christianity-edinburgh-yale-tributes.html> (Accessed 12 November 2021)
- ² Andrew F Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996
- ³ <http://andrewwalls.hope.ac.uk/collections/>
- ⁴ <https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/5/resources/87171>
- ⁵ <https://divinity.yale.edu/faculty-research/programs-and-initiatives/yale-edinburgh-group-world-christianity-and-history-mission>