

Bookshop Memories Revisited



About The Letterpress Project

At The Letterpress Project we believe that there is something very special about reading books. Holding them in your hands, turning the pages, catching the smell of paper old and new, marveling at the skills of the illustrator and letting the weight of all those pages settle in your hand or on your lap – it's an invitation to a journey that can take you anywhere.

We think that books are a gateway to ideas and adventures that expand our understanding of the world and ourselves. All reading can do that but nothing does it better than the collation of paper and ink bound between two covers that, when you open it, transforms into a relationship between you and the author.

The Letterpress Project is a not-for-profit initiative. The project's constitution and details of the Management Committee can be found on our website:

<http://www.letterpressproject.co.uk/about/what-we-do>

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THE
LETTERPRESS
PROJECT

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A short biography of all the contributors can be found at the back of this publication.

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This publication is dedicated to the memory of Edwin (Eddie) Argent 1928 – 2015

Contents

Preface	6
<i>Hodges Figgis, Dublin 1960 – 62</i> by Kevin Crossley-Holland	7
<i>A Radical Space for Radical Thought</i> by Alan Gibbons	9
<i>Fond memories of a small prairie bookshop</i> by Beverley Brenna	13
<i>Bookshops, libraries and writing</i> by Kate Maryon	15
<i>Same difference, George?</i> by Mary Rochford	16
<i>Too close for comfort</i>	
<i>How to fall in love with reading again</i> by Ria AmberTesia	20
<i>A Book-lover in Kathmandu</i> by Bruce Johns	22
<i>Memories of a man who has owned eleven bookshops so far</i> by Julian Nangle	26
Memories in Brief	28
<i>Faber and Faber memories</i> by Barbara Argent	
<i>Learning to read</i> by Janet Beniston	
<i>A bookshop experience with a difference</i> by Margaret M. Clark	
<i>Memories of Hudsons bookshop</i> by Viv Wheatley	
<i>My favourite bookshop</i> by Jane Beniston	30
<i>Charity shops</i> by Steve Dixon	31
<i>Human algorithms</i> by Alun Severn	33
<i>The Day That changed My Life</i> by Yushra Fatima	37
<i>The last week</i> by Skecia Mardenborough	39
<i>A personal experience of bookshops</i> by Jane Allcroft	41
<i>The bookshop love</i> by Katrina Jan	43
<i>In favour of small independent bookshops</i> by Jo Bowers	45
<i>Booking in Birmingham:</i>	
<i>How the second city lost its second-hand books</i> by Terry Potter	47
<i>Contributors</i>	50

Preface

In October 1934, after completing his novel *A Clergyman's Daughter*, George Orwell was looking for a job that would provide him with an income and the space to continue writing. He found it when his Aunt Nellie tipped him off about a job in a small bookshop in London called Booklovers' Corner. The part-time job came with a room over the shop and he was established in his new role by 20th of the month.

Orwell's time working in the shop found its way into his later novel, *Keep The Aspidistra Flying*, where the experience is filtered through the bitter and jaundiced eye of Gordon Comstock. However, in late 1936 and prior to the release of this novel, Orwell also published a more journalistic piece which he called *Bookshop Memories*. Orwell's assessment of life as a bookseller is only marginally more positive than the views he puts into Comstock's mouth. The conclusion of that essay has these damning final sentences:

"There was a time when I really did love books – loved the sight and smell and feel of them But as soon as I went to work in the bookshop I stopped buying books. Seen in the mass, five or ten thousand at a time, books were boring and slightly sickening... The sweet smell of decaying paper appeals to me no longer. It is too closely associated in my mind with paranoiac customers and dead bluebottles."

For those of us who have spent many years happily visiting or even working in bookshops, both old and new, Orwell's essay is hard to swallow. There are those who would point out that such views are Orwell's stock in trade – his curmudgeonly ability to see the shabby underside of almost everything is partly what makes him both funny and acute. And there are those too who would say that he's just plain wrong about this and that bookshops can be the places we most want to be – the places we go to physically and emotionally when we are seeking our 'happy spaces'.

2016 marks the 80th anniversary of the publication of *Bookshop Memories* and for us here at The Letterpress Project this seemed a good excuse to ask our friends and supporters to provide us with their own bookshop memories to redress the balance. What they've produced is an array of experiences that takes us from the life of the professional bookseller to the concerns of the obsessive collector, from local favourite shops to exotic overseas locations and from the aesthetic to the political. Reading this collection will give you anything from a momentary thought about a special time, a paean for something lost, a time of your youth recollected in tranquillity or a more thoughtful, bookish analysis of the forces shaping the bookshop experience.

Most of all we hope that all this collection will bring a smile to your face and help you remember your own bookshop experiences with affection.

Karen Argent : Project Director

Hodges Figgis, Dublin, 1960–2

Hodges Figgis, Dublin, 1960–2

By Kevin Crossley-Holland

The first poet who set me on fire was an Irish word-magician.

How I treasure the Macmillan hardback edition of his collected poems in its magenta binding, given to me, complete with inscription and yellow frisia (still there and still yellow) by Grania, the girl I'd met the week before during our first days up at Oxford.

So when I had the opportunity to travel to Dublin, all expenses paid, as part of my college tennis team (sometimes my partner was the West Indian poet Mervyn Morris, who played at Wimbledon), and with it the chance of visiting Ireland's oldest bookshop, Hodges Figgis, it was like the promise of entering Paradise. All the more so because, as my mother never failed to remind me, I was one-eighth Irish, and could claim descent from the Keoghs and Sweeneys and Vere de Veres.

Fortified by pints of Guinness in the pubs where the word-magician had spent hours, and after time spent gazing at Georgian houses he had lived in or visited, I stepped across the threshold.

Founded in 1768, Hodges Figgis was a shop that looked very much smaller from the outside than it was on the inside. Akin to Blackwell's in Oxford today. At once I was aware that this was a place altogether apart. It was quiet. You were not discouraged from talking to other browsers (or to yourself) but if you did, you spoke to them quietly. It was a sort-of secular sanctuary, wise with all the words and stories and poems within it, wise with the aura of all the great writers and other artists who had patronised and loved it.

The stock of books was obviously arranged, but lightly so, and according to principles that might escape you until a second or third visit. Not only that, many of the books on the shelves were brand-new, but they stood cheek-by-jowl with second hand books and books long out-of-print. Piles of rather tatty literary magazines were perched rather precariously on stools. While behind gleaming glass lived the precious limited editions...

Here and there, quite elderly acolytes, dressed in grey baggy suits, were arranging and rearranging books, doubtless keeping an eye on potential customers, and offering advice when asked without inflicting too much of it.

In Hodges Figgis, I discovered 19th century magazines at knockdown prices containing the first printing of well known poems by my word-magician. Excitedly I drew them to the attention of one or another of the acolytes who then immediately withdrew them... How naive I was!

But there, too, during three spring tennis tour in successive years, I bought for £2.50 each almost a dozen copies of Elizabeth Yeats' beautiful, hand-printed Cuala Press editions of poems, prose and paintings by her brothers William and Jack, Rabindranath

Tagore, Patrick Kavanagh and many more. And then, back in Oxford, I was able to come out all square by selling one at £5 for each one I kept.

After Oxford (a poet's third, for the record!), I found a job as number three in the publicity department with the publishing House of Macmillan, home not only to W B Yeats but of so many of his Anglo-Irish contemporaries – AE and James Stephens, Lady Gregory and Padraic Colum and J M Synge.

Before I knew it, I was corresponding with Sean O'Casey... his erratically-typed letters hopped all over the page. As a young editor, I went on raiding parties to Ireland and made friends with Eavan Boland and Michael Longley and many another, and very proudly published them. Apt to take so much for granted, I was still awed and seriously excited to be able to meet George Yeats – and I threw at her feet dozens and dozens of red roses. Later, she gave me permission to make a selection for children from W. B.'s work, the first of its kind, *Running to Paradise*.

Ah! How one thing led so quickly to another – my appointment by the leading Anglo-Irish literary critic A N Jeffares as Gregory Fellow in Poetry at Leeds University (1969 – 71); friendship with the literary editor of the Irish Times, Terence de Vere White; making a pilgrimage to Glendalough; visiting Inishmore and meeting Maggie Derrane, star of Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran*.

What I'm saying is that the best of bookshops not only nourish literary curiosity of all kinds but can have a seminal influence on one's life – in my case, on my writing, publishing and social life.

I've taught courses in the aisles of an American bookshop (the now defunct Hungry Mind in St. Paul) to students astonished to find the poets we were discussing were alive and kicking and looking down at us from the shelves – Allen Ginsberg and Galway Kinnell and Gary Snyder and Rita Dove. I used to lounge for hours in deep spring-less armchairs in Blackwells and read what I couldn't afford to buy. In Cracow recently, I was thrilled to see tables displaying holographs by Milosz and Szymborska...

Yes, there are still some booksellers and bookshops worth the name, not least those catering for specialised interests – and certainly not least those involved in the crucial work of igniting in children a passion for books. 'Reading for Pleasure' is such an anodyne, forgettable catchphrase – we should be talking about flames and fierce joy and setting fire... Which is where, with W B Yeats, I began.

A Radical Space for Radical Thought

By Alan Gibbons

On the fortieth or fiftieth anniversary of George Orwell's *Bookshop Memories* you might have been forgiven for thinking that little had changed in the intervening half century. The High Street was dotted with independent bookshops. In the nineteen seventies there was something of a resurgence of booksellers promoting the literature of peace, socialism, equality and community. They provided books in whose pages could be found a window onto a different view of the world. This resurgence persisted through the eighties and started to stutter in the nineties. On the eightieth anniversary, there is real cause for concern. In 2014, the number of independent bookshops fell below the psychologically significant one thousand mark for the first time. There is real anxiety that the window of rebellion is closing.

I have a personal interest in the radical bookshop. While a student at Warwick University in 1974, I joined the International Socialists, forerunner of today's Socialist Workers Party. The IS had a bookshop in nearby Coventry and I started my alternative education. I read the works of Marx and Engels in beige Progress Press editions. I toiled through *Capital* and *Grundrisse*. I read the works of Fanon, Sartre, Trotsky, Leon and Debray. I read copies of Spare Rib and discovered the likes of Betty Friedan and Kate Millett. I discovered the hidden history of Toussaint L'Ouverture's great slave revolt and pored over the history of Tom Paine, the Levellers, the Diggers and the Chartists. I read *Rubyfruit Jungle*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Jungle* and *Fontamara*. I negotiated the weird and wonderful world of the thriving Left press, exploring every murky thicket of Trotskyism, Maoism, Stalinism, pacifism, millenarianism and environmentalism. As I moved on, I haunted Grass Roots in Rusholme, Manchester and News from Nowhere in Liverpool City Centre. That early reading helped develop the world view I hold now, no longer a member of any political grouping, but still radical and unreconciled with brutal priorities of globalised capitalism.

It wasn't just about reading. It was about fevered arguments and debates, endless conversations over bad coffee. It was about battles of ideas and skirmishes with sub-cultures. It was about rivalries, friendships and communities of resistance. Alongside the literature were the posters and leaflets calling on us to support the miners or the dockers, to organise against the growing fascist threat and march against the latest imperialist war. Sometimes we had to physically occupy these premises to prevent attacks by groups like the National Front or British National Party. Whatever squabbles we had with each other, we recognised the independent radical bookshop as our space and we knew it had to be defended.

As it turned out, it wasn't fascism that started to threaten the independent, radical bookshop. It was the changing nature of our arch-enemy, capitalism. According to the Booksellers Association's annual membership figures, 67 independents closed in 2013 while 26 opened, leaving the overall number of indies on the high street at 987, down from 1,028 in February 2013.

A third of independent bookshops had been wiped out in the previous nine years: in 2005, there were 1,535 in the UK.

These bookshops have been suffering from rising rents and rates; reduced footfall because of the changing nature of shopping; and competition from supermarkets, online retailers and readers migrating to e-books. Independents, whether radical or simply community or specialist, were going down like ninepins. Hale Bookshop, Wandsworth Bookshop, The Dover Bookshop and children's specialist The Lion & Unicorn Bookshop were among those closing.

A lot of this is down to the nature of globalisation, which threatens not just the independent bookseller, but even conventional chains such as Waterstones. Amazon in particular is the remorselessly voracious representative of a new age of monopoly, squeezing out competitors. The new monopolists feel no qualms about what they are doing. One of them, Peter Thiel of Paypal says: "Creative monopolies aren't just good for the rest of society; they're powerful engines for making it better." Amazon ruthlessly strips away costs, endangering physical bookshops and even publishers. Amazon would argue that it is a forum for all political and cultural currents. It will publish anyone so long as there is a profit to be made. This is disingenuous. While Amazon might list radical, socialist and feminist literature on its sites, they are pebbles on a beach of stones and boulders, lost amid the all-intrusive promotions and market priorities. These books are not banned, just hidden away in the capitalist marketplace with no physical space of their own or knowledgeable advocate promoting them with love and engagement.

I asked several practitioners in the field of radical bookselling and publication for their views. The first was Mandy Vere of News from Nowhere, a bookshop I have frequented for decades. Mandy says:

"News from Nowhere has had a much better couple of years – due to a combination of factors: recent closure of nearby Waterstones; higher profile, locally and nationally, due to publicity around our fortieth birthday and the Independent Liverpool initiative; backlash against Amazon because of revelations of their tax avoidance and appalling employment practices; levelling out of the e-book threat.

We have long argued that independents, and radical bookshops in particular, only needed those people who think of themselves as in any way progressive to do at least a proportion of their book buying in indies, to create enough business for us to survive. This seems to have come to pass for News from Nowhere, at least for now."

She sees this as related to a renewed interest in radical ideas:

"The upsurge in support for radical politics, particularly amongst young people (which by the way pre-dated and helped to create the conditions for Corbyn's win rather than being a result of it as a lot of media commentators seem to think) has certainly contributed to our survival. It's why radical bookshops are such a vital resource, to both help to create that awareness, and to be there to support and encourage it (through the books we stock and our support for progressive campaigns) as movements emerge. We were worried a few years ago that our demographic was getting older and older and we were in danger of dying out with our customers but this

A Radical Space for Radical Thought

has changed. We are currently seen as quite cool amongst young people – long may it last!”

Ross Bradshaw of Five Leaves in Nottingham says:

“I think that to be a town, village or area without a bookshop is like a desert. I think bookshops add so much to the cultural life of a place that without one an area is poorer for it.”

He too sees an encouraging growth in curiosity about radical ideas:

“The shop has doubled its stock and increased its staff since opening, and does well enough to pay its staff the Living Wage – one of only two bookshops (the other being Housmans) to have signed up for the Living Wage. Our Christmas turnover was 20% up on last year and we continue to publish and to host weekly talks in the shop, together with our autumn Bread and Roses Festival. The last book we published was a fundraiser for local and national refugee charities and we expect to raise £3000 from the poetry collection *Over Land, Over Sea: poems for those seeking refuge.*”

Five Leaves not only sells books. It publishes them. Indeed, one of my books, *A Street of Tall People*, a children’s book about the Cable Street mobilisation against Mosley’s fascists in 1936, appeared under a Five Leaves imprint.

Andrea Butcher of Bookmarks in London, concurs with these sentiments:

“Amazon is cheaper and quicker. But there are many of our customers who feel very uncomfortable about their working practices and prefer to support independent booksellers. If you know exactly what you're looking for, Amazon is tempting. But lots of our customers come in to the shop in response to something happening in the world and they trust us to have something that addresses the issue. Part of our role is to curate a selection of socialist responses to key issues and to make that available to activists, trade unionists and anyone who wants to understand the world. Although we operate as a standard bookshop and can order any books our customers want, we stock the shop with those books we believe best help people sense of the world and can give them the arguments, political understanding and confidence to make a difference here.”

Andrea, like Mandy, points to the living link between radical movements and the radical bookseller:

“When Syriza won in Greece and when Jeremy Corbyn won the Labour Leadership, we had lots of people come into the shop immediately after wanting to talk through what was happening. You can't get that from Amazon.”

Bookmarks has a publishing arm. Andrea says:

“As a publisher, we carry the same principles through to the books and pamphlets we publish. New books that address the key issues activists are facing or historical prices that she'd light on the world today of cultural publications that enrich and deepen our understanding of the world. The accepted narratives for artists such as Shakespeare, Bob Marley, Shostakovich, John Coltrane often only give a partial story, and putting

their lives in a political context often allows readers to enjoy their art even more and serves to remind us all of how great humanity can be and why we are fighting for a better world. Our Rebel's Guide series is another great introduction to political ideas and activity. This year we published the RG to Eleanor Marx which has been really popular and next year we have Malcolm X coming out. Both, incidentally by young first time authors”

The marvellous Letterbox Library is another brilliant outlet, focussing mainly on children’s literature. What these independent radical booksellers say about the link between their existence and living, vibrant anti-capitalist movements is crucial. If thought and literature is increasingly defined within the context of a monopolistic marketplace, its very freedom and counter-narrative is compromised. The radical bookshop is a space for radical thought. Whenever the narrative of the status quo collides with social reality, large numbers of people search for a counter-narrative. Just as in the Thirties when Orwell was writing, the Left Book Club appeared, so there will always be a counter-culture. The more we frequent the premises of this counter-culture, the stronger it will be. In a world of global warming, war, terrorism and fragile economic structures, we let the doors to the independent, radical bookseller close at our peril.

As Mandy says:

“We constantly strive to live up to people's expectations of a first class bookshop and provide people with a bit of literary and political hope!”

Notes

There is an Alliance of Radical Booksellers <http://www.radicalbooksellers.co.uk> which has initiated:

The Bread and Roses Award for Radical Publishing <http://www.bread-and-roses.co.uk>

The Little Rebels Award <https://littlerebelsaward.wordpress.com> (administered by Letterbox Library)

The London Radical Bookfair <https://londonradicalbookfair.wordpress.com>.



Fond Memories of a Small Prairie Bookshop

By Beverley Brenna

When my three sons were young, family excursions into stores were almost always overwhelming expeditions that ended in tears: sometimes theirs (“Why can’t I have that candy bar?”), and sometimes mine (“Why won’t they stop touching things and fighting!”). While public scrutiny caused me at times to doubt my capacity for motherhood, especially during moments of embarrassment such as a supermarket trip when I discovered with horror that my youngest, although safely ensconced in the shopping cart, was wearing around his neck multiple pairs of his brothers’ underpants, I was nevertheless on a journey both exciting and daunting. Thankfully, a number of havens presented themselves along this parenting trek, and for these I have been most grateful. One such haven was our local Saskatoon bookshop, Bookworm’s Den.

This bookstore was only a five-minute drive from our house, fortunately close enough that trips to and from could be made on a minimum of gasoline, an expense we were trying to limit, and without snacks or games, which could then be saved for more trying expeditions. It was a distance equal to the few nursery rhymes I knew by heart, rhymes that could be belted out so that the youngest of our group would fill in the ending lines, thereby distracting him from poking the brother seated close by. The store’s proximity was even such that children’s shoes, left accidentally on the roof of the car, would usually be there still when the vehicle reached its destination.

Under the haze of newly minted motherhood, I commonly demonstrated many of the faults Orwell complains about in his essay *Bookshop Memories* (Orwell, 1936). I nostalgically looked for the books of my own childhood; I recalled book jacket patterns in hopes that the bookseller might connect me to a title or author; I probably did smell of old breadcrusts—or bread pudding, an economical family dessert of the day—and I occasionally forgot my wallet and needed to leave books on hold for later payment. Sometimes I even forgot my credit card in the store, oblivious until the ensuing phone call. Orwell’s term of choice “vague-minded” most certainly applied. However I guarantee that the generous booksellers at my chosen establishment did not consider me a pest—or if they did, they were far too kind to let on.

What I discovered when inside the establishment was a sunny and inviting refuge, where particular corners enticed older children into building and craft activities, and where the owners themselves—Wayne and Carry Dueck—were at my service in terms of baby-minding and literary consultation. As soon as I entered the store, Wayne would dart over to promenade the baby while I browsed or asked Carry questions about titles and authors. The Dueck’s knowledge and dedication to current children’s literature and children was meritorious, and these qualities were combined with one other essential skill in terms of their ability to broaden our reading repertoire—including the wisdom to recommend titles on the basis of knowing the person for whom these titles were intended.

In addition to a supportive environment in which to locate superb children’s literature of all genres and forms, I enjoyed my conversations with the Duecks, parent to parent. In return for sharing with them my sons’ interests and achievements, I learned about

their adult boys, and could envision my own troop growing up. It seemed as if one day my eldest loved Eric Carle's *Very Hungry Caterpillar* best of all, and the next day he was desperate for Lloyd Alexander's high fantasy, but I know there were many, many good titles in between. The Dueck household had also undergone similar rapid-seeming change, and both expressed time-travel experiences, encouraging me to savour the moments of childhood because, truly, it would not last.

It was in The Bookworm's Den where I discovered the tremendous diversity in counting and alphabet books and the range of Mother Goose from Charles Perrault's artistry onward. I perused new material by international as well as Canadian and Saskatchewan authors and noted prairie themes embedded in both narrative and illustration. And I observed other patrons, some of them young teens, and craftily noted preferences in series books and stories that combined high seriousness and humour for when my own children might someday travel those heights.

Even though on many days we simply browsed without tangible purchase, my children and I learned much at the capable hands of the Duecks. I found my interest greatly ignited in children's literature as an art form and encountered many more authors, especially prairie counterparts, than I would have discovered on my own, important experiences that helped inspire and develop my own writing career. My children enjoyed the stimulation of the shop, the books purchased immediately or inscribed on wish lists, and, just as valuable, the children enjoyed conversations initiated by this wonderful pair of shopkeepers who treated them like the respected customers they rose to become. There was no fighting in this shop, and as for touching things—the books and related toys were meant to be touched, as long as the children treated them carefully, which they quickly learned to do. The Bookworm's Den was a kind of child-centred training ground for behaviour in all public places; in baby-steps my offspring learned what invoked adult respect and praise, as well as a lifelong reminder to my three sons that books are important.

Preparing for birthdays, Valentine's, and Easter always involved a trip to The Bookworm's Den where one special book was selected for each child. These purchases were made in hopes that rereading would provide hours of comfortable literary fun. Off to College, my eldest boys have packed particular books away, items they anticipate connecting to again in the future, just as I continue to save the dearest books in my possession for engaging again with characters whom I have found inspirational.

The Bookworm's Den is, alas, no more. It closed its doors, after twenty years of service, due to competition from big box stores. Yet it, and the happy memories we shared there, rise in contrast to the internal workings of the bookshop depicted by Orwell. His literary picture, while certainly humorous, leaves readers with an image of the bookseller as someone who likes titles better than people, highbrow reading over individual choice, the seller's own personal preference dominating. This is the very opposite of what readers may discover through the world of reading—that reading itself is a social activity, that the world of books has room for everyone, and that no single reader can speak for the rest of us. I am heartily glad that Orwell chose not to be a "bookseller de métier." In comparison to the Duecks, he was not at all well suited to the task.



Bookshops, Libraries and Writing

By Kate Maryon

My passion for books was ignited very early on in life. My mum was a great reader and showed us by example that books were to be collected, respected and devoured. The only trouble with the former was that money was tight. Her choices re spending were pretty much cheese or toilet roll, so book buying came way down the list. My passion though, remained and a cunning plan was formed. I'd spend hours sitting on the floor of our local bookshop in search of something that fully grabbed my attention and then I'd scurry off to the children's section of the beautiful Carnegie library in Teddington, where I grew up, to borrow it. This became the pattern for years and I devoured all the wonderful fruits on offer.

As a shy and troubled teenager my school library became a place of refuge during lunchtime, a place of safety, of beautiful words and kindly staff. Struggling to manage the drama of an extremely traumatic childhood, books brought me comfort from the madness and sadness I was living. Through stories I discovered two important things – that it was possible to navigate difficulty and come out the other end, and that some people had wonderful lives full of love and possibility. I longed for this sense of possibility for myself and so set off on a lifelong inquiry into human nature. This led me into a career working with children and families in a therapeutic setting. And then, as my own children grew and began to leave home the natural progression of life took me to writing stories of my own. I effortlessly wove together my love of books with my passion for writing and the understanding and insight gained from my own troubled past and from having worked with thousands of children therapeutically, the result being a collection of five novels about ordinary girls who find themselves facing an extraordinary situation.

My hope for my books, talks and writing workshops is that they help children who are facing overwhelming difficulty, with little or no support, to feel less alone in their troubles. As well as being enjoyable and entertaining, I hope they offer comfort and a toolkit to help them navigate their way through life, and to know how and when to ask for help. I want them to know the dramas they are living are not their fault, that they're not responsible for their parents or the problems going on around them. I hope to inspire them to choose their own path in life, to find their own true voice and to know that they can create the life they want. I hope too that the loved children, the cared for ones, will find a deeper sense of compassion and understanding for their friends whose lives might not be so easy as theirs.

So, back to bookshops, now I'm fortunate enough to be able to buy the books I desire, time spent sprawled across shop floors, reading whatever I can get my hands on still remains a not so guilty pleasure. And every time, particularly if it's raining outside, I'm taken back to those early feelings of finding sanctuary amidst walls of books, the ever growing tower by my bedside proof of my enduring passion.



Same Difference, George?

By Mary Rochford

Here's a question I would put to you – how do you respond to the sight of books galore in a bookshop or library? Do you buy into George Orwell's assertion in his essay *Bookshop Memories* (1936) that after a prolonged period of exposure, 'Seen in the mass, five or ten thousand at a time, books [are] boring or even slightly sickening'? Or perhaps you are more inclined to share the belief that I held for many years, that the sight of row upon row of neatly stacked books is awe-inspiring and overwhelming in equal measure. Awe-inspiring, because I could assume, from the sheer volume of evidence staring me in the face, that every facet of human existence had been considered and chronicled by someone, somewhere, over time and that I had access to it; a fact that is, of itself, overwhelming.

And another question I would ask – what do you hope for when you select a book from the thousands on offer? For myself, and focusing on fiction, I would say that when I choose a novel, short stories or poetry I want to find myself reflected in the characters that people the book, and find those characters reflected in me; to make a connection with people and events that I might never experience in my own life and thus gain a deeper understanding of the joys and horrors of our multifarious world. I want to be gripped and moved and challenged, emotionally and intellectually; to be informed and enlightened. Am I asking too much; being too demanding? I say, 'Hey, if you don't ask, you don't get.' Of course, what I asked of the books I read changed and developed over the years.

The very act of entering a repository of books has been, for me, a quest for knowledge and excitement, a life-long treasure hunt, so it would be fair to surmise that my memories of bookshops are less jaundiced than those expressed by George Orwell in his aforementioned essay. This is no doubt due to the fact that I was a user of the shops (or as Orwell would probably have it – an abuser) rather than a book seller. However, I do have one thing in common with the bold George in that, over time, my relationship with book shops eventually changed my attitude, if not towards books, then certainly towards bookshops.

I was born and grew up in Dublin which is, by any measure, a literary city. The list of Dublin-born writers is certainly impressive and, as a native of that city, to name them all might be viewed as the act of a braggart, so I'll restrict myself to mentioning the two who, in my opinion, have been the most influential – James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, two writers who have, I feel, fulfilled my entire list of literary demands.

Although contemporary Dublin lauds these writers and other literary geniuses who hail from the city (literature is, after all, a great money-spinner these days what with readings, festivals, etc.) it was not always the case. Many Irish writers (together with scribes from around the globe) endured the ignominy of being outlawed under Ireland's Censorship of Publications Act 1929 ('the fiercest literary censorship this side of the Iron Curtain,' according to Robert Graves). Samuel Beckett's work suffered this fate. James Joyce's *Stephen Hero* was apparently banned but *Ulysses* escaped the

Same Difference, George?

censors for the simple reason that it was not offered for sale in Ireland when first published.

Despite the fact that many of the world's leading writers were prohibited in Ireland the Dublin in which I grew up had book shops aplenty. However, it would be fair to say that they were off my radar throughout my formative years because books were a luxury which my family couldn't afford. It's not that we didn't like to read, most of my family of ten, were avid readers, but our books came from the local public library; Rathmines Library supplied us with the bulk of our reading matter from the age of seven until we grew up and left home.

In the early 1960s I was employed as a book-keeper by a clothing firm in Middle Abbey Street. My duties entailed a daily visit to the bank to deposit all monies received from our customers. At two o'clock each day I left the office, turned left out of the building, left again onto Lower Liffey Street and across the Ha'penny Bridge. From there I should have entered Temple Archway, emerging in Dame Street where the company's bank was situated. Instead, I made a short detour along Aston Quay to George Webb's second-hand book shop. I'm not sure whether I was motivated by my love of books or by a desire to skive off work, but whatever the reason, this is where my attachment to book shops began.

Hundreds of books were laid out in neat rows on the trestle tables which lined the pavement outside the shop. I would run my fingers across the spines of the books; occasionally take a volume in my hands and leaf through the pages, enjoying the soft, smooth texture of the paper as it yielded to my touch (eat your heart out Kindle). I don't recall having found a title that appealed to me from the many books available; I don't recall ever having bought a book from this shop at this time. What I do recall is the surge of anticipation as I stepped off Ha'penny Bridge and took the left turn which would take me to a treasure trove of the unknown.

From the musty, unthreatening Webb's on the quays where you could browse endlessly, I graduated to the brash modernity of Eason's which was smack, bang in the middle of O'Connell Street, Dublin's main thoroughfare. The shelves were stacked with bright, pristine books – gaudy in their newness – and although I spent much time gazing at them, as soon as a smiling, assistant uttered the words, 'Are you looking for anything in particular, there?' I was out the door like a shot.

Other bookshops that penetrated my consciousness (which was, in the main, alive to the charms of dancing, films and boys) whilst I still resided in Dublin, were Fred Hanna's in Nassau Street and Hodges Figgis in Dawson Street (which still exists) although, again, I have no memory of buying any books from either store. It would be true to say (and this would come as no surprise to George) that although I was addicted to the practice of bookshop browsing, the Dublin book merchants didn't profit greatly, if at all, from my presence in their stores.

On arrival in Birmingham I returned to first base and joined the library, initially borrowing my reading matter from Erdington Library and, subsequently, from Shard End Library. It took me several years to discover the delights of Hudson's Book Shop in the city centre. At this time I read many of John Steinbeck's works, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Moon is Down*, *Cannery Row*, *The Pearl*, *The Winter of Our*

Discontent, East of Eden and several others, some bought from bookshops, some borrowed from the library. Edna O'Brien was another favourite author. Her books had been banned in Ireland so it was not until I lived in England that I discovered her writings which had a particular resonance for a young, female, Irish emigrant.

My book-buying spree started in earnest when I was offered a place to read English and History at the University of Birmingham. Unable to rely on the library to fulfil the requirements of compulsory reading lists, I made many rather hurried visits to city centre and campus book shops. From this period, until recently, bookshops became an essential element in my developmental and social activities. In whichever city or town I happened to find myself I couldn't resist the lure of the book shop – London, New York, Boston, Toronto, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Cork, Swansea and others. I rarely failed to visit Webb's on my trips back to Dublin and it is with pleasure (and some relief, George) that I can report that I parted with my cash and frequently bought books as gifts for my sons (who, incidentally, George, introduced me to many of your works; those I remember most vividly are, *Down and Out in Paris and London, The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia*).

During the 1980s, on a visit to my native city I finally found bookshop Nirvana. My friend Deirdre took me to The Winding Stair on Lower Ormond Quay. On the ground floor was a conventional book store, but next door, up the rickety, winding stairs one entered a large, bright café with floor-to-ceiling book shelves on two sides, stacked with second-hand books. This was the drill: you browsed unhurriedly, selected a book, paid for it, ordered a coffee, a delicious cake or sandwich, sat at a gingham-covered table, read your book, sipped your coffee and, through the large windows, watched as Dubliners went about their business, over and back, across the Ha'penny Bridge. Bliss, perfect bliss!

Fast forward to 2008 and my relationship with bookshops changed for ever. I published a collection of short stories, *Gilded Shadows*, and the unimaginable happened. Alongside writers such as Roddy Doyle and Anne Enright, my book was long-listed for The Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and was stocked by bookshops in both England and Ireland. I discovered that, as in the days of my residency, Dublin was still liberally furnished with bookshops, selling both new and second-hand works. Among the stores that stocked *Gilded Shadows* were, Books Upstairs, College Green; Book Worms, Abbey Street; Book Shop, Rathfarnham; Rathgar Bookshop; Alan Hanna's, Rathmines; Books on The Green, Sandymount; Waterstone's, Dawson Street; Hodges Figgis, Dawson Street and, wait for it – Nirvana itself – The Winding Stair.

The initial excitement and elation of knowing that my books (I subsequently published a novel, *Niamh Takes Ulysses Home*) were being offered for sale in shops in Birmingham and Dublin (and elsewhere) turned to a paralysing dread. I was still awe-inspired and overwhelmed when visiting bookshops but for very different reasons than had hitherto been the case. Seeing my books displayed alongside the works of all my literary heroes – James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Edna O'Brien, Salman Rushdie, Patrick McCabe, Neil Jordan, Maya Angelou, Milan Kundera, Toni Morrison, to name but the merest few – brought on a fit of blind panic. In the presence of such exalted company it seemed that putting pen to paper was an act of the most rabid self-aggrandisement. And another thing, witnessing the sheer scale of the competition made me want to

Same Difference, George?

scarper and never return. Bookshops, which had been the source of so much pleasure and satisfaction throughout my life, had become alien territory.

So there we are George; in relation to book shops we seemed to arrive at more or less the same place, if for very different reasons. We both ended up being sickened by the sight of books in the mass. Just as you did after your stint selling books, I now tend to borrow the books I want to read. If absolutely necessary (having ordered my book by phone – no I don't use Amazon – don't get me started) I will make a quick sortie to Waterstones, head for the cash desk, complete my transaction – determinedly ignoring the stacked shelves and tables – and hightail it home with my precious purchase where, as I have done since the age of seven, I open the book and enter a new world.

(In memory of Colin Graham: 23rd March 1967 – 5th April 2014.)



Too Close For Comfort

How to Fall in Love with Reading Again

By Ria Amber Tesia

At the time of writing this piece, Valentine's Day is just around the corner. We're effectively being bashed over the head from all quarters of media, to feel loved up, drop a small fortune on a box of chocolates or bunch of roses and eat out on Valentine's Day. Since when did it all become... so commercial?

With rebellious hackles rising, I ask, what if you don't want to feel loved up? What if you don't want to be dictated to, as to when to be loved up? What if like me, you prefer to declare your love consistently, throughout the year and not just on the one day, where everything is triple-priced, to ultimately line the pockets of greedy capitalists?

In my humble opinion, the same can be said of books and reading. With various book awards throughout the year (Costa, Man Booker and Orange, I'm looking at you), it is easy to feel overwhelmed by books that you 'should' read, rather than out of pure pleasure.

So much so, that for a few years, I actually stopped reading. These aforementioned book awards were great, in that they championed the physical book form and reading. However, I found the lists to be too literary, bordering on the elitist for my liking.

I'll give you a prime example; *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson, published in 2004 is a Pulitzer winning novel. It had garnered excellent reviews, there was a lot of noise about it online and in the bookshops, and this intrigued me enough to make the purchase.

And I hated it. As a writer, I dislike being negative towards fellow authors, so I shan't be too vocal in my criticism of the book. Suffice to say, it wasn't for me, nor the rest of reading group that I was a part of. (This is a source of comfort for me, that the book was disliked by 99% of the reading group, as it wasn't just me who may have been a picky reader.)

It wasn't just *Gilead*. There were a whole host of award-winning books, much lauded about, that were topping bestseller lists worldwide – and I just couldn't see why.

In the end, I gave up. I stopped reading books, spending my time writing and watching television instead (Netflix is a blessing for binge-watching your favourite shows). It was only recently that I realised I missed reading. Wanting to meld my two (former, might I add) passions of reading and baking, I set up the Derby BookCake Club.

And I found myself slowly, but surely, falling back in love with reading. It was a positively glacial journey, but I'm glad I have reached my final destination. As George Orwell said: "Books... seen in the mass, five or ten thousand at a time, books were boring and even slightly sickening."

Too Close For Comfort

This is how I felt about books. Now I'm happy to report that I adore everything about books, from their scent, to their jackets. I'm working on my second book, I read and write every day and I love books. If you have fallen out of love with reading, I'd recommend joining a reading group. If there isn't one in your area, organise one yourself. Go to your local library and check out author events. Above all, keep your mind and heart open – because you never know when you're ready to fall in love with a good book.



A Book-lover in Katmandu

By Bruce Johns

In the summer of 1995 I flew with my family from Hong Kong, where we were living, to England for a holiday. Keen to make the most of the journey, and with a travel allowance that made detours possible, we had decided on a stopover in Kathmandu. It was an eye-opening week for all sorts of reasons: the saturation effect of all those stupas and temples, the culture shock of a pre-modern world, the cows asserting their right of way. We saw a goddess chewing gum. Kohl-lined eyes watched us from shuttered balconies. A stomach bug did the rounds.

Wherever I went in those days, however, almost the first thing I looked for in our Lonely Planet was the section on local bookshops. Even if nothing sold there was in English they seemed to open a door of some kind to the spirit of the place, and along the more obscure tourist trails one could always stumble upon something precious, disposed of by a backpacker trying to lighten their load or raise money for the fare home. Once, waiting for a ferry on the island of Koh Samui, I finished Anthony Burgess's novel about Christopher Marlowe and wished his take on Shakespeare was to hand. Then, with time dragging, I wandered into a shack that sold second-hand paperbacks and my eye picked out, among all the well-thumbed potboilers, the dog-eared cover of *Nothing Like the Sun*.

Kathmandu had a number of shops, one of which was near the Yak and Yeti Hotel, an oasis of trustworthy food and clean toilets. Encouraged, we paid a visit and were instantly entranced. There were three storeys – or was it four? The stock was heaped, piled and crammed in glass-fronted cabinets, along miles of wooden shelves or on the narrowest and least negotiable stretches of floor, a profusion of paper like that in the airline office where we had reported our luggage missing. It must have been like this in the chancelleries of the Raj. Here was one of those shops in which an addiction to books trumps any commercial logic. There were rooms devoted to academic disciplines that nobody in Nepal had ever studied; subjects so well catered for they might have been national collections; and, straddling both categories, a stockpile of volumes dealing with sex that took me back to my father's copy of the *Kama Sutra*, bought from an establishment like this in India during the war. The maze-like disorientation, happily submitted to; a residue of literary dust on the tongue; the exclamation that greeted each unearthing: it had all the ingredients of bookshop heaven, even down to that small note of dissent which rebels against being stuck inside.

What did I buy? Not as much as I wanted, that is for sure. With a budget and baggage allowance to consider I restricted myself to five books, all by the same author. We had recently read *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth and declared it a landmark in both senses: brilliantly written and so big it could be seen from afar. Vaguely aware that Seth was still quite young, I could not imagine he had had time to write anything else. Yet here was an entire shelf devoted to his work that seemed to take in almost every conceivable genre. I came away with a travelogue about Tibet; *The Golden Gate*, his LA-based novel in sonnet form; a libretto, *Arion & the Dolphin*; Three Chinese Poets in

translation; and a slim volume of his own verse, *The Humble Administrator's Garden*. Such energy and brilliance outshone the base metal of my own imagination. There in Kathmandu I renounced all pretensions to being a writer – although, like giving up girls after having one's heart broken, this self-denial was bound not to last.

That was not all, however. Like many great bookshops this one dabbled in music and the visual arts. Inevitably it housed what must have been the largest selection anywhere of books dealing with Nepalese architecture. Local crafts were for sale. And several racks of posters could be flipped through like giant Rolodexes. Here we came across some prints by an Australian artist not encountered before. Robert Powell paints and draws Asian buildings, religious and domestic, ornate and mundane. There is a draughtsman-like quality to his eye, a richness of muted colour and a lack of rhetoric or sentiment that honours without romanticising the traditions being observed. We bought two posters of his work and have them still. One depicts a courtyard in Bhaktapur, showing a wooden arcade with windows and ornaments above, the carvings weathered to a silvery grey. The other, my favourite, is 'House near trolley bus station in Kathmandu' in which an old door and a wall of flaking plaster are given equal billing with a triptych of decorative arches.

I could have happily have taken up residence, a pale-skinned book wallah kipping on the floor; but all too quickly the time came for us to go. The children were retrieved from some cave-like sanctum on another floor or returned to us by a smiling member of staff. And this brings me to the most important aspect of my bookshop experience. As any bibliophile knows, the art of browsing demands a particular atmosphere which is largely dependent on the quality and attitude of the staff. There is no standard personality to which they must conform. We have all experienced the grumpy sociopath who seems to resent our intrusion, the mumsy type dying to make us tea, the amiable scatterbrain at whom even shoplifters draw the line. The best ones all have this in common, however: an ability to be non-intrusive but knowledgeable if required. Kathmandu's palace of books was run by a discreet yet obliging polymath and a number of helpers in whom a generic helpfulness and love of their trade was combined with that most genuine and humbling of gifts, the hospitality of the poor. I daresay our bill exceeded their weekly wage. In such places one's passion for reading, progressive in every other respect, is a reminder that the world's values are skewed.

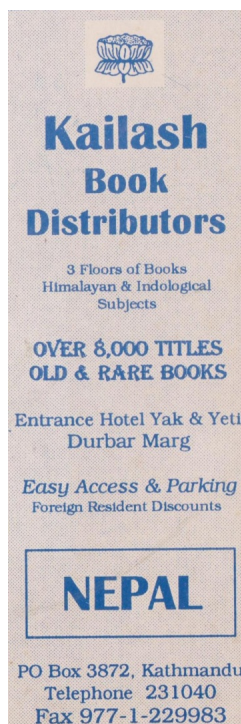
No doubt you have noticed that one thing is missing from this account, the bookshop's name. The fact is I cannot remember and neither can my wife, normally more reliable in this regard. I dig out those volumes of Vikram Seth's in the hope that their inside pages were franked but the condition they were sold in was loyally, lovingly pristine. The photograph album from that time is no more revealing, with its endless pictures of temples and bilious kids. Then comes a moment of inspiration: perhaps our copy of the Lonely Planet survives. We threw some out recently on the grounds that they were outdated or never likely to be needed, our voyaging less ambitious these days. Both considerations would apply to the edition covering Kathmandu in 1995, but the hoarder and nostalgist in me apparently prevailed because among the remaining spines with their familiar logo and font appears the name I am looking for: Nepal.

As on the plane from Hong Kong, a flight delayed and then buffeted by storms, I search the index for bookshops and turn to that page. Several are listed but the one close to the Yak and Yeti was the Kailash. There is no thunderclap of recognition but it

must be the one and with the help of the internet I am able to find out more. Kailash is the name of a mountain in the Himalayas said to be the paradise of Shiva – a little more evocative than ‘Waterstones’. The enterprise was founded in Varanasi by Rama Nand Tiwari, an enterprising young book lover who sold his wares from a blanket outside the Government Tourist Bungalow. Subsequently he moved his operation to Nepal, starting in Pokhara then moving himself and his stock to the capital. There he acquired the Pilgrims Book House from the Hare Krishna sect and by adopting western business methods and dealing directly with distributors in India became the largest bookseller in the city.

It was in 1990 that the need for expansion led to premises next to the Yak and Yeti. Kailash Book Distributors was born. Its first job was to house the antiquarian department whose quirky specialisms had such an effect on me. The company tried its hand at running a hotel and, more successfully, promoting local handicrafts – that memory at least is correct. Then comes a disappointment. In 1997, two years after our visit, Kailash closed down, to be replaced by a four-storey emporium in Patan housing rare books among other things, making it one of the largest of its kind in South Asia. My hopes of seeing a photograph and persuading myself that I remember the place are dashed. Without something tangible to draw on the identity of the bookshop I can visualise so clearly feels insecure.

Unbeknown to her, it is our eldest daughter who saves the day. We always encouraged (or enforced – parents and children remember these things differently) the keeping of scrapbooks on holiday, albums of postcards, boarding passes and bus tickets with annotations in a painstaking if resentful hand. As an afterthought I wonder if those from Nepal have survived and find Amy’s, fat with mementos that I, the taskmaster in such matters, no doubt provided. Several pages in, after descriptions of visiting temples and a failed attempt to spell diarrhoea, she has pasted in a bookmark which tells me all I need to know:



A Book-lover in Katmandu

My research is vindicated. The memory has a name. On the other hand the number of titles is less than I remember, the scale of the place exaggerated in the process of recall. And the comment written by the side of the bookmark provides a surprise. Not regarding the shop itself, whose range of interests made an impression on her mind as on ours. 'It had any subject you could wish for,' she writes. 'A book on Tibetan carpets and rugs, on the farming industry of South Cambodia, that sort of thing.' Not bad for a thirteen year-old. But she goes on to say: 'We visited this shop quite a few times.' Really? I only remember a single occasion, a one-off enchantment that has left its mark on me for twenty years.

That is the problem with our recollection of anything, be it a novel by Vikram Seth or the most vivid of experiences. We get half of it wrong and make the rest up, not on purpose most of the time but in the interests, native to us all, of telling a good story.



Cat 8 and Cat 54

Memories of a man who has owned eleven bookshops... so far

By Julian Nangle

Julian has kindly given permission to reproduce the following Catalogue Introductions that were originally published by Words Press in his own Personal Note issued in 2015 in a limited edition of 250

CAT 8

Summer 1997

I have dated this catalogue 'Summer' as the first ball of the first 1-day match between Australia and England has just been bowled, indicating Summer is truly here. At present Australia are 26 for 1 and looking ominously confident, particularly Steve Waugh. Oh dear, his brother Mark has just hit the ball to the boundary! Enough of this, let us consider brighter things such as the veritably bountiful selection offered here. I say this with no modesty whatsoever because I'm very pleased to own, however temporarily, such gems as the very sadly late Laurie Lee's *An Obstinate Exile*.

Speaking of Laurie Lee I have never forgotten a visit I made to Bernard Stone's shop, The Turret Bookshop, in 1983 when Lee's *Two Women* had just been published and he happened to be sitting chatting with Bernard when I arrived. The three of us went out for a drink at some local hostelry and, after discovering I had responsibility for two small girls, Lee inscribed his book, which I'd purchased before we left the shop, "For Julian Nangle and his two women with love from Laurie Lee and his". It is one of those treasures one cannot put a value on. So when I hastened back home in time to pick up the said responsibilities from their respective schools and prepared us a good healthy soup I excitedly shared the treasure with my children. Alas, they were keener on arguing their case to watch *Starsky and Hutch* than perusing Lee's beautiful book, so I mused over the book alone a little later, flicking over the pages in awe of the great man. Imagine my chagrin then, when I fumbled and dropped the book – plop – straight into my second bowl of soup, staining forever the red cloth covers (I had removed the dust jacket in best 'collector' fashion before allowing the children anywhere near it). I still have the book of course and have grown enormously fond of the stain to the lower right-hand corner of the upper cover, as have my daughters.

Since writing this, both Mark and Steve Waugh have lost their wickets!

There IS hope for England.

CAT 54

Summer 2008

Everyone we tell says, “you’re mad, but actually, it just might work...”. Anna and I have decided to open a bookshop. Another bookshop. This after swearing on the bible of booksellers, ‘The ABC of How to go Bankrupt’ by Ivor Problem, that we’d never ever open another shop whatever, whatever. Well, we decided to buck the trend.

Chichester has something of a paucity of good bookshops and, speaking for myself, and a little for Anna, I just love the theatricality of owning a bookshop; of showing the world my wares. Perhaps ‘exhibitionism’ is a truer word than ‘theatricality’, but it doesn’t reflect quite so well, does it, so I’ll stick with the theatrical connection.

And why not, in Chichester? There is so much culture here which lies hidden, almost suffocated, by the designer clothes shops and chic jewellery shops. We are convinced that, if offered a watering hole, the culture vultures will come drink. We sincerely hope so. There are already art galleries to die for here, there is the world-famous Chichester Festival Theatre, there is an extremely good blues guitarist and singer who busks infrequently who could give Eddy Grant a run for his money.

We need a renaissance – I am sick and tired of foul-mouthed yobs and yobettes clogging up the airwaves and streets with the lack of their inspiration and imagination. I want the world, at least in Chichester, to realise how lucky we are to live the way we do, with the culture, cleanliness, and cuisine we have. I want those of us with a civilised, humanistic attitude to our fellow man to rise up more strongly than ever and tell the negative nerds that seem to dominate the news to take a walk or get positive. I want dreamers’ dreams to surface, not stay stuffed under the pillows of regret. And that is why I’m opening another bookshop – so there!

The Crane Bookshop, 4a Crane Street, Chichester, P019 1LH, 01243532977 – from September 1st 2008. Launch Party on Friday September 5th 5.30pm. Come, you are warmly invited, but please let me know if you accept the invite, as my daughter Poppy, who will do the catering, needs to know numbers.



Memories in Brief

This section contains a number of shorter contributions.

Faber and Faber Memories

By Barbara Argent

The home of Faber and Faber Publishers in the early 1950s was 24 Russell Square. I had applied for a job there with literary stars in my eyes hoping to be able to rub shoulders with famous authors and poets from my lowly position of Junior Clerk in the Accounts Department. They probably employed me as my last job had been with the Caxton Publishing Co. rather than for any accounting expertise which I definitely did not have.

In those days Faber was a very elitist organisation, with the ground floor staff on a different plane to the shining ones on the upper floors – a situation which Geoffrey Faber tried to improve by inviting us all to a Garden Party at his country house once a year. Here we stuck rigidly to our own perceived class, any subsequent encounter with T.S. Eliot or his secretary on the stairs at no 24 did not even elicit a friendly nod.

Once I was entrusted with the important task of typing the Annual Royalties when the chief typist was away, and that was the nearest I ever came to contact with any of the authors. But Russell Square was a pleasant place to eat my lunchtime sandwiches, and I only left Fabers when my first child was expected in 1955.

I Could Read!

By Janet Beniston

I was only a little girl and I did so want to learn to read but somehow the words didn't make sense.

Haltingly, I tried and tried but stumbled along slowly. Then one day I was reading Hansel and Gretel and suddenly everything became clear. I could read!

From that day forward books were and still are my constant joy. Fairy tales, classic novels and gardening books even Grey's Anatomy!

When my younger daughter was a tiny girl she announced that she was only going to school so that she could learn to read! And so the love of books continues through another generation.

A Book Shop Experience with a Difference

By Margaret M Clark

In 1940s, during the Second World War, I was an undergraduate at Glasgow University, living at home. During one summer vacation I worked in a book shop in the centre of Glasgow. The experience was not what you would have anticipated, browsing through exciting books. This shop, The ABC Book Shop sold textbooks, mainly second hand and the main demand from customers was near the end of the summer, when schools and colleges were about to commence.

I was employed for about eight weeks, but not only was I paid a very low wage, but half of each week`s pay was held back until the end of the summer to ensure I stayed for the full period! I think it may have been as little as ten shillings a week though I wouldn`t like to stake my life on that. I do remember that my first pay as a primary school teacher several years later was £320 per year, so that could be about right.

I had little time to read any books, and only seldom the excitement of actually selling books. My most vivid memory is of working in the basement, duster in hand, taking second hand books from the shelves and cleaning them!

Memories of Hudson`s bookshop

By Viv Wheatley

I decided to have a break from teaching in the late sixties and try my hand in a bookshop. Hudson`s was a large store in Birmingham and run by two brothers and sister who interviewed and appointed me. They were very involved with the day to day running of the shop and personally ran a training session for all new employees on how to deal with customers and the books. They were also seen in the shop regularly. I was lucky enough to be in the lively main shop and was responsible for the cookery and household management books. On a regular basis we had to take the books from the shelves and "bang" them to keep them dust free. It was my responsibility to know my own stock as well as be aware of other sections so as to be able to direct and inform customers.

The only "celebrity" I dealt with was Noelle Gordon from Crossroads but quite often people would say "Did you see.. ?" – which of course I didn't!

One of my lasting memories is having copies of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* wrapped in brown paper under the counter. Twice I was asked for copies which was a bit of excitement. How different were those days!

There was a canteen in the basement and more than the food I loved the shelves of proof copy books which we could help ourselves to!



My Favourite Bookshop

By Jane Beniston

"Fancy a ride out somewhere?" he said, acting as if he wanted to spend time with the family. In reality, he had seen the jobs list on the kitchen side and didn't fancy doing any of them today thank you. *"Yes we could go to that little place on the river,"* I said pretending I had forgotten it's name. He, keeping up the pretence, though he knew where I meant.

In the car, kids in the back listening to music on their phones, I was a world away imagining new discoveries I might make. On arrival we parked where we usually did, by the tall wall overlooking the river. The water flooding its banks. We expressed pity for the people living nearby but my mind was on other things.

Walking down the high street the antiques shop was always good for a rummage, old chairs outside and a funny row of odd umbrellas. My daughter found a brass bell that reminded her of school and had just enough pocket money to buy it. Next a spot of lunch, again the usual place! A café, pretending to be French, but with a northern air. He watched the sport, I waited, nearly there now.

"Shall we walk back via the sweetie shop?"

"Yeah!" cheered the kids

"I'll just pop across the road" I said, but they all knew where I was going.

I opened the door and heard the old fashioned bell ring as I entered a different world. My favourite book shop! The musty smell of words and more words, histories of people long dead, worlds of fantasy and fairy tale. I passed by many books stacked floor to ceiling and headed for the back, down a narrow passage way to the right. I hunted in the usual place with a slight air of panic, pulling off books to see where they had gone.

"What's the problem back there?" came a voice.

"Oh it's you, I moved them! Come with me."

Following the book shop owner I felt relief, he hadn't sold them all. I sat on the floor oblivious to the other customers and ran my fingers along the rows of books. The Brontes, he had moved them to the classics section, they were still here. I took each book out smelling the pages and reading snippets of familiar lines. All too soon I heard the bell.

"Are you ready to go?" the family asked.

"I was never ready to go and leave my favourite bookshop!"



Charity Shops

By Steve Dixon

Don't get me wrong – I love bookshops. My wife reliably informs me that whereas I am generally a reluctant and grumpy shopper, I will happily browse the shelves of a bookshop for hours. And I do still buy books from bookshops. But I tend to buy most of my books second-hand, and from charity shops.

I know that this is probably a scandalous thing to say in a collection of thoughts and reflections about bookshops, particularly in light of numerous complaints from second-hand book sellers that charity shops are taking their trade, but it's a habit I can't break. It started as a student in the 1980s, when I would devour fiction at a scandalous rate – buying low-cost second hand books from a charity shop was the only way I could conceivably feed my habit. And my local charity shop, in a university town in the Midlands, seemed to have a never-ending supply. That's it – I was hooked.

Gradually, I found that it was physically impossible for me to walk past a charity shop without popping in to peruse the shelves. Back in the 80s, it seemed that all charity shops had copies of *Jaws* or *The Deep* by Peter Benchley, as well as complete shelves of unwanted Danielle Steels. These days, it tends to be discarded Harry Potters, anything from the *Fifty Shades* series, and an obligatory pile of pristine looking diet manuals (I've always wondered about these – were they donated because they didn't work, or because they did?).

As charity shops replenish their stock through donations, I quickly caught on to the fact that their bookshelves would generally reflect the interests and tastes of their local community (or indeed, their non-tastes). And sometimes whilst browsing I would find myself idly dreaming of why the books had been donated, rather than the books themselves. Were these sad, lonely, cast off books? Were these unwanted Christmas or Birthday presents, accepted with false smiles before being furtively consigned to the "charity shop pile"? Or were these the treasured collection of someone who sadly left us? Even now, 30 years later, I question whether these are books that take up too much room, getting in the way of the new wall-mounted 60 inch telly, or the old fashioned p-books of a technophile with a bright new shiny Kindle.

The charity shop veteran soon begins to notice how many of the books they already have. This is a skill that develops quickly, usually after arriving home triumphantly with a bag full of novels, only to find half of them frowning at you from your own shelves. It's also a vital skill in that although charity shops will always have their standard titles, their stock is always changing. As such, your purchases can often be eclectic – I remember once returning with a collection of Maupassant short stories, a Madhur Jaffrey recipe book, and the bizarrely titled *Breast and Buttock Fetishism* (a 1950s psychology text that I thought would make a great joke gift, you understand). A good charity shop will always have a handful of classics – a couple of Dickens, a few Trollopes, the obligatory Brontes – even when I already have these I often muse on how they would make a great starting point for someone else's collection.

There is only one golden rule when buying books from charity shops – fellow customers are your enemy. Yes, there are some that use charity shops like libraries – returning the books when they’ve read them and then buying more, so they can combine their love of reading with “doing their bit for charity”. However, there is nothing worse than your initial thrill of excitement upon seeing an absolute gem, or something that you’ve meant to read for ages, being replaced by a pang of horror when you see someone else’s hand reaching for the same book. In the rare instance that there are more than two people in this situation, the exchange of territorial looks through half-closed eyes can be a bit like the ending to *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*. However, such contretemps seldom end in a cemetery shoot-out, but are usually followed by forced politeness – a medley of “you first”, “no, you first”, muttered through gritted teeth.

And you can strike lucky, you can find those gems. A friend of mine once found a screenplay of Hitchcock’s *The Birds* signed by Tippi Hedren (this was in my local charity shop – I have never forgiven him). Several years later, I stumbled upon a first edition of *Ecstasy and Me*, the autobiography of Hedy Lemar, also signed, and found in the same shop. The conspiracy theorist in me has never been able to let this go. There is obviously some grand evil plot to surreptitiously fill the local area with signed copies of autobiographies of old Hollywood stars. We need to be careful.

I have had one nightmare experience in a charity shop. I remember once browsing the shelves, noticing how many titles I had at home. Then I realised with horror that I didn’t. For these were my books. In the charity shop – donated. Thankfully, it was actually a nightmare, but it’s one I’ve never forgotten, and one that has a certain poignancy. For if, as another friend of mine once claimed, buying books from charity shops is a form of literary recycling, then one day all of my books may well return there, ready for the next reader. In a way, they’ll be going home.



Human Algorithms

By Alun Severn

I planned to begin this piece by saying that even when Orwell wrote *Bookshop Memories* he was consciously writing of an archaic, vanished world, but as is so often the case, especially with things we think we know well, my own recollection proved faulty. The kind of daily and weekly journalism Orwell was scratching a living from in the mid-1930s used material up fast, and in fact *Bookshop Memories* was written and published in November 1936, perhaps only weeks after he ended his two-year stint at Booklover's Corner, a secondhand bookshop/circulating library/philately shop in Hampstead.

But in one sense my recollection *was* correct: almost any version of bookselling that predates the digital age is a vanished world – erased by the new 'disruptive technologies' that neo-liberals everywhere are currently so deeply, hopelessly enamoured of. Unless it is their markets that are being disrupted, of course.

I fled to bookselling because it offered a refuge, but I became a bookseller mainly by accident and partly from inertia: I did it for so long that I became good at it. In late-1972 I was working in a double-glazing factory on a canal-side industrial estate in Smethwick. There were about a dozen of us, I suppose, and we made double-glazed windows by hand in almost Victorian conditions. The works were managed by one of the founder-owners, a pugnacious, chain-smoking Irishman with a vast belly and the filthiest and most casually offensive language I had ever heard. What I most wanted was to stop making double-glazing: I didn't have a career plan that went beyond this modest ambition.

When I saw a trainee bookseller position advertised at Hudson's Bookshop in Birmingham, I knew that this was what I most wanted to do. That it meant a drop in wages from thirteen pounds–something a week to eleven pounds–something seemed an entirely negligible consideration. What I didn't realise was that bookselling – in most of its various forms – would be my work for the next twenty years. Nor did I recognise that bookselling would change my life and make me the person I now am. That I eventually also came to loathe it is almost incidental and in any case largely outweighed by the profound pleasure and sense of self-worth it sometimes offered, especially in the early years.

When I began at Hudson's Bookshop in February 1973, the sprawling shop was still owned by the Hudson family and three of its members – two brothers and a sister – were still to be seen every day on the shop floor. During the thirteen years I spent there I progressed from trainee bookseller to one of two assistant shop managers, responsible for nearly a dozen departments, around sixty staff, and all mass market paperback, Penguin and library fiction buying. I eventually went from there to radical bookselling and distribution, and then to institutional and library supply. But nothing left as deep a mark as the years I spent as a retail bookseller.

In the early-70s bookselling was still regarded as a career – certainly by serious bookselling establishments. One underwent a lengthy accredited training period, working towards a Diploma in Bookselling, and we were encouraged to see ourselves as part of an honourable profession with long and cherished traditions – helped in this by the fact that some of the people we worked with in those days had been bookselling since the war, their attitudes and opinions in many instances formed even earlier than that and essentially unchanged. It may have been this that made the atmosphere of that great, jumbled gloomy store at times so unmistakably Edwardian. One regular customer of mine, a collector of fiction first editions, would only be served by me and always rang before visiting to make sure I was available. “Simmonds here, old boy,” he would always say. “Are you well? Good show. Now, have you got...?” He spoke to me as I imagine he did to his tailor, his bank manager and his wine merchant, and with the same implicit trust that like them I would do my utmost to meet his requirements professionally, efficiently and honestly. Oddly enough, I liked this.

But bookselling at that time was also an extremely physical and labour-intensive undertaking. The almost unbelievable volume of stock, non-existent goods-lifts and three-storey layout added to the physical demands, while a complete absence of computers added to the labour-intensiveness. It now seems slightly shocking to think that even when I left retail bookselling in 1985 there still wasn't a single computer in the entire Hudson's store – no computerised stock control, point-of-sale hardware, or bibliographical data-base.

In the absence of computers a training programme – no, it was more than this, it was a world-view – had been devised which put stock knowledge at the centre of the bookseller's universe. Stock knowledge was what you gained from ordering, unpacking, checking-in, lifting, carrying and selling every title that sat on the shelves of your department. But even this wasn't quite enough. The Hudsons' mantra went further: stock knowledge began with your own department – but should include a passable knowledge of the stock in the department to either side of your own. And good manners and etiquette demanded that books were located and taken *to* customers. You tried wherever possible to avoid pointing or sending customers to look for books. It was bad form.

After a while you could tell who was going to become a good bookseller and who would fall by the wayside. Those who had what it took had something in their DNA that enabled them to retain vast quantities of bibliographical information – and the best of us were like human algorithms. Titles, authors, publishers, departments and shelf locations – all waiting in our heads to be called up. Even now, my mind is crammed with precise, almost photographic images of thousands of titles – as they looked in their published form up to around 1985. Nothing imprints a book on the human mind quite as deeply as carrying three hundred copies of it up five flights of stairs.

What I've said so far may make it clear why what happened to bookselling in the 1980s and 1990s was inevitable. It had to change if it was to survive. Bookshops were being stalked by investment banks and venture capitalists, but these investors needed bigger sales, greater profitability, lower stock investment, quicker turnover, longer credit and better cashflow. They wanted a 'booktrade', but not the one that existed. They wanted a new turbo-charged booktrade, part of a vertically integrated entertainment complex,

Human Algorithms

where the killings were big and fast. God alone knows who told them this was possible.

Of course, I didn't understand this at the time and I imagine very few shop-floor booksellers did. What we noticed was that a gradual shift was underway – from stocking more ('depth of stock' was something that good booksellers had previously been expected to develop and invest the company's money in) to stocking less; to trading more with publishers that gave the best discounts; to opening tentative discussions with publishers' reps about payment for window displays. All this and more is now the common currency of retailing, but in the 70s it constituted cultural change on a positively Maoist scale. And hand-in-hand with this must go longer opening hours.

Oddly, as a shop-worker it had rarely struck me that shops were open during the hours when virtually everyone else was at work, and were open for relatively little of the time when everyone else wasn't at work. Again, it now seems obvious, but at that time I didn't really regard it as being in my own best interests to work a shift-system so that strangers could buy books at night. And it was probably this more than any other single factor that finally propelled me out of retail bookselling and into radical bookselling and distribution.

In 1985 I began work for a long-defunct co-operative, a radical bookseller, distributor and publishers' agent specialising in books from and about the third world. If the revolutionary change sweeping through mainstream bookselling was Maoist in its scale and ambitions, that sweeping through the co-operative, radical and black bookselling movement in the mid- to late-80s was essentially conservative. We were trying to preserve a radical bookselling tradition that was largely unchanged since the eighteenth century and to prove this we occupied premises that hadn't been cleaned since roughly that time. We all but wrote orders out with quill and ink.

But it was terrific fun and every day brought something different. Devising a sales pitch for a new history of the ANC; writing a quick memo offering a Marxist rationale for why we shouldn't do compulsory racism awareness training; lugging books in gigantic printers' bales up the rickety stairs to our fire-trap warehouse floor. It was all in a day's work.

While there was some truth in the view that radical bookselling was largely about marketing the non-commercial to a dwindling number of not-always-open outlets, the co-op I was a member of went significantly beyond this. We realised that we could do a better job of selling the third world literature, development studies and politics titles from mainstream publishers than their own sales forces could and we opened a small shop with a wholesale trade-counter in London to service this market. The co-op also acted as sole UK agent and distributor for a number of very well thought of African and US publishers. This twin approach – identifying the most sellable titles that met our ideological aims and doing a good job of selling these titles to bookshops where demand was healthy – was extremely successful and for several years helped ensure the co-op's survival. But the writing was on the wall. It was getting harder and harder – although I still believe that the precise combination of personal and political differences, ineffective management and market forces that sunk the co-op could not

have been foretold, certainly not quite in the way that they manifested themselves. But that is another story for a different time.

By the time I was ready to move on from the co-op, there wasn't much bookselling in Birmingham that I hadn't already tried, and I ended up working for a library and institutional supplier. It turned out to be the dreariest bookselling I ever engaged in, as bad in its own way as the double-glazing factory. It made me realise that my bookselling days were drawing to a close. At the time it seemed a shocking conclusion to reach. A working life that wasn't about bookselling? Well, if it had to be done, so be it. Certainly, it's true that I miss the booktrade deeply, and that every kind of work I have done since that time has seemed a compromise because it hasn't involved books. But it still isn't quite the whole story. What I really miss is the young man of forty years ago who worked as a bookseller and for a brief period truly believed that no other kind of work could be better or happier or more natural.



The Day That Changed My Life

By Yushra Fatima

As a very young child, I was not one to visit bookshops purely for pleasure, although in those days, the mobile bookshops were brought into my primary school approximately once a year. A few of said mobile bookshops came to my primary school in the late 1990s, when I was approximately aged 5 or 6 years. The way these were set out instantly grabbed my attention and thus, my love of literature was born. Rows of beautifully arranged books were just beckoning me to come and thumb through, exploring new worlds. The night before, my parents had given me and my brother £3-5 each, to be spent on a book from the book fair and I was excited to spend my money independently.

I remember one afternoon towards the end of a term and the bookcases were open in the tall hall, enticing us with promising new worlds and colourful covers. I remember waiting in a line, eager to grab the book that had caught my attention when I walked into the hall, anxious that another child would notice the book and claim it. As I watched a small group of classmates look at books, I silently begged them to hurry up so the next group of children could go.

As soon as the librarian let a handful of us across the barrier to browse through the books, I immediately rushed to the book and grabbed it. As I held this book in my hands, I felt extremely excited to read it. This was the first ever book that I had bought at one of these book fairs. It was a novelty picture book that had pages which were cut out, so when you flipped each cardboard page, there would be a hole of the same size. Within the hole was a jelly-like nose, which would stick where ever you threw it. I remember my best friend's mother being reluctant to touch the slimy-looking object, despite our persistence. To this day, we laugh about the memory.

As a 5 or 6-year-old, I was very fond of throwing the jelly object on the ceiling, only for it to fall back onto me when I failed to catch it on time! With this book, I realised that I enjoyed reading books 'just for fun'. The thing that had attracted me to the hardback book was the vivid colours used on the front page and the large jelly nose, causing me to practically knock down my classmates in a bid to get to it first! Now, every time I look or pick up a picture book, I take in the colours and the style of it before I open it. Holding this book, I could not pay quickly enough. However, we had to wait an hour or two until we could go home. But asking my mother now, I learned that I tore off the cellophane wrapper that covered the jelly nose straight away; I was barely out of the school playground! But it is with great sadness I reveal that the jelly-like object would no longer stick to the ceiling for longer than a couple of seconds after it attracted lint and dirt.

A few years later, when I was aged around 8 or 9 years, we were clutching £1 tokens in our hands, ready to be spent at the World Book Day fair. Many girls in my class chose books that were pink and girly. However, as such books had run out when it was the last few children's turn to choose, I had to make a choice from a very limited selection of 'boyish' books that did not really peak my interest.

The book I eventually bought with my token was called 'Cool!' by Michael Morpurgo. As I type this, memories and scenes from this story are flooding back. The synopsis of this book was what made me choose *Cool!* over the other books. This story is about a boy called Robbie. He is hit by a car when he runs to save his beloved dog, Lucky. Robbie finds himself in a coma and trapped in his own mind, unable to do talk or do anything. However, he is still able to hear what is happening around him and as this story is told from Robbie's point of view, he is able to describe the emotions, sounds and smells from his unconscious experience the way he sees them. It is interesting to see that the way he perceived things whilst in a coma were very different to real life. When I read the first page of the book, I just could not put it down. In fact, I loved it so much that I read it in one day, much to the chagrin of my teacher, who wanted us to read our books during the holidays.

Each year the book fair came to our school, my admiration for writers and books was increasing, until a couple of years ago when I decided to start writing. This was partly influenced by my love for literature. But after being told that I have a very wild yet creative imagination, I decided that an imaginative mind has the power to change negative minds and also have a positive impact on people's lives.

After publishing a few pieces on a Canada-based website called Wattpad, I am truly shocked at how people from all across the world have liked, commented and enjoyed my writing, even if it is only fanfiction at the moment. Even though Wattpad is a form of technology, I am the type of person who likes reading a real book, rather than using a Kindle or an iPad, because there is nothing like the smell and feel of good old paper.

Within my family, a variety of literatures ranging from picture books to Arabic literature hold a prestigious status, having being perused regularly. I know that reading, books and literature will always be a part of my life and I plan on living lives, visiting different worlds and having adventures through different characters.

Although I have a few career aspirations such as becoming a mainstream teacher, a teacher of the deaf and supporting children with disabilities, I have decided that I am not going to stop writing. It would be a dream come true to be able to publish a selection of short stories that I am currently working on one day, along with other projects. Writing and literature will always be a part of my life and I hope to pass on my love to future generations, be it my own or other children.



The Last Week

By Skecia Mardenborough

"What are you doing here?" she asked curiously. I'm pretty sure it was obvious– I was carrying a pile of books and heading towards the 'staff only' door. *"Working"*, I promptly replied and continued on my way. Behind the door, I composed my thoughts and recollected how many times I had received the same reaction. During the course of the week I had been approached by Mr Philip: Deborah: Ruth: Mrs Joshua: Mr and Mrs James: Michal: Leah: Jude and now Joanna! They all knew me from someplace or another– previous employment, school, church, or family connections. After each encounter, I became increasingly irritated by their probing. *"No, I didn't leave my perfectly 'good' job to come and work here"* and *"no, I'm not the Manager"*. They all seemed to suggest that a bookshop was not a suitable place to work– unless of course, I was managing!

Who knew they would all visit this particular bookshop, during the same week? I had never seen them enter, let alone enquire, place an order or buy something during the last fifteen months! However, the word spread rapidly of our imminent closure. They all echoed the same sentiments, as they made their bargain purchases *"I've been coming here for years"* and *"it's such a shame you are closing"*. Pity they hadn't shown as much commitment over the years by visiting frequently, buying as opposed to only browsing and collecting their orders within the timescales. We thought seven days was perfectly reasonable, but God knows how much we spent on reminder letters and telephone calls!

I sighed and gently placed the pile of books inside the box, ready to be labelled for the courier collection. As I re-entered the shop floor, Joanna pounced on me with an apocrypha in hand. *"I've seen this cheaper online"* she announced, for all to hear. *"No wonder you're closing"*. I almost retorted, but professionalism saved the moment. I replied cheerily *"let me just check that on the computer"*. You see, we have access to the internet too, so we can quite easily verify if Jungle is selling said item at the stated price. She was right. It was cheaper. By five pence! I applied the five pence reduction to appease her and put the apocrypha aside, while she continued shopping.

Since March, I had noticed the customer approaches to discounting– some were keen to price match so they could make an immediate purchase (without having to await online delivery). Some, on the other hand, made up ridiculous prices to see what they could get away with! When their attempts failed, they soon scurried out of the shop, mumbling something about *"going home to place my order"*. We couldn't possibly throw our profits away– not when there were staff wages, rent and other major running costs to consider. We never referred to the online retailers as *"our competitors"*, because we simply could not compete with their marketing strategies and buying power. Some of our customers did not seem to understand this or maybe they didn't care. I suppose they were happy to get what they wanted, for the cheapest price possible and maybe that's all that mattered to them. I felt sorry for those customers who came in regularly and had no internet access. Visiting the shop was a part of their daily or weekly routine and they told me how much they would miss the interaction

Bookshop Memories Revisited

and sense of belonging. I encouraged them to visit a similar bookshop a short walk away, but they said *"It wasn't the same"*. I wondered what would become of them. In a matter of days, the shutters would come down on this place and it would all be over. I reached for Joanna's basket and rang up her items. She told me this was the most she had ever spent. I was not surprised- after all, most things were hugely discounted.



A Personal Experience of Bookshops

By Jane Allcroft

Somewhat unusually for a literature student I have no childhood memories of book shops. They are something I came to in adulthood. Some time in my twenties, when I was painfully shy, socially inept and unable to “say boo to a goose” as the saying goes, I discovered a world where it was not only okay to be quiet and shy but it was positively encouraged! A world inhabited by other people like me – I hadn’t really imagined there would be others – who didn’t require me to be able to strike up a conversation and weren’t interested in gossip or banter. What a wondrous relief. I had found a type of place where I could be myself without fear of reprisal or ridicule and not only could I relax in a quiet corner but I could simultaneously indulge in a love of the written word.

Second-hand book shops were, and indeed are, the best. The person behind the counter is more likely to be there because they too love books and are often a fountain of knowledge regarding authors, genres or non-fiction topics. Usually the person in a second-hand or charity book shop can tell you if they have a particular book or works of a particular author, or are happy to help you track it down. Of course they too need sales but most often they don’t give off the aura that it is their *raison d’être* as the young sales assistants in new chain book stores do. In second-hand book shops I could peruse both nearly new and well-thumbed books of all descriptions, shapes, sizes and smells. Being small I tended to avoid the more weighty tomes that would make my wrists ache to hold and headed most often for the standard sized paperbacks for fiction or smaller hard-backed information books.

There is a certain excitement about a good second-hand book shop that has a kind of mystical element to it. You enter with a sense of both anticipation and trepidation – what bargain awaits you today? I have always found that it is better to go into the shop with an open mind, as if on an adventure where you have no idea of the destination. If you are in search of a particular volume the excitement of the hunt can become the drudgery of endless, fruitless searching and the once-loved aroma of age and slight mustiness can become irritating and unwelcome at the least, or worse, the cause of sinus problems and itchy eyes. However, an unplanned adventure through the shelves of a favourite section can bring great delights. After months or even years of following colleagues’ and family recommendations and absorbing endless historical novels, romances and ‘Aga sagas’; all of which became a repetition of the same plot after a while; I discovered travel writing. This is a genre which includes both fiction and non-fiction and can take the reader to so many previously unimagined or unknown corners of the globe through the varying unique perspectives of the travel-writers. Finding an old travel book can open a door to a lost world or a forgotten way of seeing familiar places. In non-fiction books a previous traveller may have added their own notes or comments and occasionally a post-card or personal note has been left between pages, perhaps as a book-mark, opening up another story of the readers before you.

I confess that books have always been my escape from the fears and drudgery of reality and, for me at least, second-hand book shops are part-and-parcel of that world of escapism. Somehow part of the evil of consumerism but simultaneously standing against it; symbolising re-use, recycling, regenerating the lives of not only the books themselves but of the readers who delight in the bargains to be found and owned and cherished.

In the new-age world of internet down-loads, kindles and 'live-streaming' I'm delighted to say that my twelve-year-old daughter has inherited my love of books. They exist as an alternative world alongside the internet and you-tube and provide a different type of entertainment which is equally as absorbing. The love of second-hand shops has not yet been passed on though. For her the 'proper' book shops, like Waterstones, are exciting places where she can find the latest edition of a series she is reading or an unexpected new book that catches her eye. She has been found caressing the glossy cover of a new book, which I suggested she might find at a fraction of the cost in a second-hand shop, telling me "No, this is so shiny and smooth and smart and new!"

So I say without hesitation that both old and new books are still such an important part of our world. When a computer-addict like my daughter can spend hours wallowing in a book shop it's proof enough that 'old' and new technology can and should exist side-by-side. They are different experiences and everyone should be exposed to both.



The Bookshop Love

By Katrina Jan

When the bookshop door opens the chime of the bell is sweet music to the lifeless volumes sitting on the shelves. It is not the words of a nineteenth century book which makes it archaic but the dust which covers it. I like the way an old book feels. The way the yellow pages are crisp with age and their texture rough beneath your fingers. The second hand books are the best because they have lived other lives with other readers. They could have travelled across oceans and gone along with people on pilgrimages before coming to our little bookshop. I imagine people are drawn to a bookshop because it's that feeling of not knowing what you will find. It's the mystery of it all. You may go in looking for one type of book and come out with another. There are many hidden treasures to a bookshop, the smell of old forgotten novels tends to creep up on our bookish customers, who range from snobbish folk to the mentally unstable kind, who don't quite know where or who they are. There is a never a dull day in the bookshop. The stories hidden beneath these hard and paper back covers are almost as interesting as their readers. There is old Mr Walton who comes in every Tuesday, why on a Tuesday I'll never know. Perhaps it's the one day of the week Mrs Walton goes into town for tea or a spot of shopping, who knows. One starts to speculate such things when sitting around a shop all day. Anyway, this Mr Walton is a strange fellow, the intellectual sort but suspicious looking to say the least. He comes in a grey cap, almost the same shade of grey as *The Mill on the Floss*, wanders about for ten or fifteen minutes towards the back of the shop. Then he is joined by a middle aged woman, red coat and black short curled hair. She is always looking anxious, her eyes darting from one book to the next. Mr Walton slips an envelope into *Pride and Prejudice* it's never the same novel but it is always an Austen book. He then picks up another book at random. I say random but it is always a typical English novel of course – one he has no doubt read a thousand times before. He goes to pay for it at the till always in haste and never fails to add his witty comments.

"Yes, old sport. This one please – NO I do not want any of the half priced candles thank you very much. I don't plan on setting fire to Mrs Walton anytime soon."

In the meanwhile the redcoat woman has retrieved the envelope from the *Pride and Prejudice* book and left the store. What is in the envelope is beyond me. I could only presume it's a cheque of some sort or perhaps Mr Walton is a spy and the redcoat woman is his accomplice. On other Tuesdays I have pondered as to whether they're having an affair and the envelope is Mr Walton's love letter to his mistress ... what a scandalous novel that would make.

Fortnightly there is dear old Mrs Flowers, I say dear but she is annoying as hell. She assumes I am telepathic and expects me to immediately know what book she is looking for as soon as she opens the shop door. Her book requests get stranger with each visit.

"Dear I want a blue book. A blue that sparkles like the sea in a sunset of passion. It has to tell the tale of two lovers, one a sailor thought to be lost at sea. The other feared a spinster".

I offer her *Persuasion* though I cannot find a blue cover that sparkles like the sea and she is deeply dismayed by this and leaves the store with her nose turned up.

Then there is Mr Garter, who seems quite out of his mind. On more than one occasion I have seen him come into the store in ladies slippers. He caught me peering once and tried to justified himself.

"I say don't look at me like that. They are this season's. Soon every gentleman in London will be wearing them. Some people just don't know style when they see it!"

If that was the case then was red lipstick in too? Because he was wearing plenty of that. I hoped not, I wouldn't want to feel left out if all the gentlemen started wearing ladies slippers and red lipstick. We must keep up with the trends of course, no matter how absurd. Mr Garter was indeed bizarre but he was by far my most entertaining customer. I remember the time he sniffed every single book on the fifth row, he said they ought to fragrance the books and he wouldn't purchase one unless he found one that smelled of flowers. He rarely bought anything anyway. Apart from our scented candles at the front of the till. He loved those. I mean several times a week he would come in, and pick up a heap of books, take them to the counter and never got round to paying for them, because he would dramatically exclaim something along the lines of ...

"Oh what's the use? Romeo and Juliet die. Heathcliff and Catherine die. Anthony and Cleopatra die. Miss Havisham dies a spinster! Oh god help us all. There's no hope for us. We're doomed! Doomed to a life of tragedy. Love is nothing but death and death is nothing without love. Oh what will we do? The world is cruel. Cruel I tell you!"

It was usually at this point he would run out the store hands raised asking the almighty the meaning of it all. Other times he would just sob at the counter and I would offer him a tissue and try to stop him wailing like a woman from a Shakespearean tragedy. No ... I'm mistaken ... even she wouldn't have wailed so much. The sight of a tissue just made him even more hysterical. The candles usually eased his tears so I would offer them whenever he would burst into a fit of passion. He was actually good for business. A few times I had the casual bookworm come up and ask me what on earth had he been reading and if they could get that to go too.

Although I often find myself questioning the reason I work here. I find the world of books unlike no other. Their touch, their smell, their texture, their weight and even the way they stand on the shelves holds a strong value to me. It was not the novels nor the warm atmosphere of the little bookshop that made me fall in love with it so but it was the readers who come in with their own stories, searching for books to escape into. They want to forget their own mundane lives but what they do not realize is they have their very own story. They bring life to the store and meaning to the books. Each customer is a part of a tale ... an extraordinary tale, they just don't know it.



In Favour of Small Independent Bookshops

By Jo Bowers

Throughout our lives we keep memories, moments and stories that remind us of something good that happened to us. It is often not a particularly remarkable event or experience, but it is still something significant to us for many different reasons. When looking back over my collection of stories, I see connections and threads that link them together. Some are obvious and some less so. However, I have one very clear connection in many of my favourite memories: books, bookshops and reading.

As a young child, visiting bookshops was something I loved to do. One of my earliest memories of this was the opening of a small independent bookshop in the town where I lived. This was the first time I had been in a shop that sold books other than WH Smith so it was very exciting. My mother knew how much I loved books so she took me there one Saturday morning and told me I could choose any book I wanted. To this day I still have the book I chose: *The Talking Parcel* by Gerald Durrell. I had never heard of it before but I loved the bright cover and the idea of a talking parrot in a story. I also used my mother's tip for selecting a new book to read: during visits to the local library she suggested reading the first paragraph or page, and if it draws you in, then it's a good sign that you're going to enjoy it. I still sometimes use this benchmark but, more often these days, I am rarely without a list of recommendations that I take with me to bookshops or libraries. To house all of the lovely books that I started to acquire my father made me a wooden bookshelf that I still have today. It was built to fit my paperback books perfectly and still does.

I think that first venture into a small independent bookshop stayed with me. Later, in my late teens, when a love of all things alternative became part of my life, I began illustrating and drawing headings for a fanzine that my then boyfriend was writing. He would interview bands, poets and singers and, in the days before computers and printers, I would turn the pages into magazine articles by designing and illustrating the interviews and their headings. The excitement was not only in meeting the bands backstage but also getting on trains to Liverpool and Manchester to visit small bookshops to sell our crudely published fanzines – photocopied and stapled by hand. One bookshop that particularly stands out in my memory is a co-operative, not-for-profit community bookshop that is still going strong in Liverpool, News From Nowhere. I loved the name, and it enticed me into the bookshop which was filled with books that I had never heard of before. It had a coffee shop inside too, which, although fairly unremarkable these days, was a rare find in the 1980s, especially to someone who grew up in a small North Wales town. The coffee shop comprised a few second-hand tables and chairs and facilities to make your own tea and coffee, with a tin to put your money in once you had made it. I still love the image I retain of my visits there.

What it said to me back then, and still does, is that small independent bookshops are different, original places to find books you would never find anywhere else. A place

Bookshop Memories Revisited

where individuality is encouraged and, indeed, celebrated. From here on, throughout my life, I have continued to love these kinds of bookshops. I seek out and find delight in bookshops everywhere I go, whether it is children's books, second-hand books or a bookshop that sells all kinds of books for everyone. I should end on my favourite recent bookshop visit. It is a children's independent bookshop as I am still as drawn to browsing, buying and reading children's books as I was when I was a small girl. The bookshop is Tales on Moon Lane in South-East London and, for me, it is the name and the absolutely magical window displays that give this shop its unique charm. I also love that it is a small bookshop with a huge capacity of books, visiting authors and activities. For all these reasons it is yet another example of a bookshop I never tire of revisiting, and so my bookshop pilgrimage happily continues.



Booking in Birmingham

Whatever Happened to the Second City Second Hand Book Trade?

By Terry Potter

At some time between 1972 and 1974 I fell hopelessly in love with second hand bookshops. I had joined Hudson's Bookshop in the centre of Birmingham in 1971 as a trainee bookseller and found myself working in the section that dealt with sociology, psychology, technical sciences and foreign language books. For reasons I could never fathom the management team clearly thought I was the ideal person to deal with enquiries relating to scientific and technical dual and multi- language dictionaries. I speak no foreign language competently, failed the majority of my science and technical exams at school and couldn't begin to guess what mechanical engineering was all about - I did, however, have a sociology A level, so I guess that's what got me the gig.

In the spring of 1972 I was offered a place at university and thought I might like to give it a go - but jobs were hard to come by and I was reluctant to leave this one. The shop, however, had some enlightened attitudes towards the development of their staff and I was promised a chance to have the job held open for me on the understanding I returned to work there during every university holiday. I jumped at the chance. Even better, when I returned for the first Christmas break I had been moved to work in the fiction section - after all I was studying English Literature.

Going to work at Hudson's had an unexpected consequence and by the summer of 1972, before leaving for university, I had developed a bad case of book lust. I wanted to read everything but more importantly I wanted to own everything - I desperately wanted my own library. Working in such close proximity with so many books and finding myself alongside other people who also loved the books they sold lit a new fire - there were books out there by authors that I'd never heard of but who seemed to have exciting things to say. I also came to understand that there were books which were no longer available to buy - they were out of print and only available from second hand bookshops.

Wages in the book trade were (and possibly still are) notoriously dreadful and despite giving very generous discounts at Hudson's I couldn't afford to buy many new books and the prospect of being an impoverished student didn't seem to be offering much of an improvement in my circumstances. Maybe, I thought, second hand books might be the solution - the ones I'd seen on offer in the junk shops near where my parents lived suggested they might be available for pence rather than pounds. And now I had another motive - the search for the out-of-print gem.

And so my second hand book adventures began here. There were, I discovered, second hand book shops to be found not too far from where I was living. The first shop I uncovered with the help of a telephone directory was run by Stephen Wycherley (something of a Birmingham book legend) who at that time had his premises within a terraced house in the Greet district of the city. Going in through the front door, straight off the street, into what would have been the front room the prospective book

hunter would find the space filled with tall shelves loaded with books. At this time I was virtually without discrimination and I would leave with a hold-all bursting with my finds or Stephen would helpfully provide an empty cardboard box for me to struggle home with. And the prices were something I could live with because I discovered what seemed to me perfectly good books were available in hard cover book club editions for pence rather than pounds.

On my way to Wycherley – I didn't have a car and so anywhere off the bus routes meant I had to walk – I also stumbled on another second hand shop in Sparkbrook which turned out to be owned by the Maxwells. I never knew their first names but Mr and Mrs Maxwell had two shops – this one which seemed to focus more on collectibles and a second in the Acocks Green district that was substantially bigger and had a more general stock. The collectibles shop was not open as often as the Acocks Green one and I think it was the first to be closed – maybe the lease expired or maybe trade just dried up. Sparkbrook is not the most affluent postcode and I suspect the residents didn't prioritise book buying – having two second hand book shops in close proximity probably says more about the relative cheapness of rents than prospective shopper footfall.

Book shop owners aren't in my experience natural early birds and they would open their shops some time after 10 a.m. – which was at least an hour too late for me. Working in a shop myself meant I would usually have a week day off to compensate for Saturdays on duty and both Wycherley and the Maxwells must have been constantly astonished to find me sitting on their shop steps waiting for them to open.

At some point – the dates rather run into themselves – Stephen Wycherley relocated to the middle class suburb of Harborne. His new shop in Vivian Road had the sort of picture window his first shop lacked and moving here must have been an astute business decision given the economic profile of that district. However, the low rents of the Sparkbrook/Greet area seems to have tempted another bookseller there later in the 70s (or was it the 80s?) – Roger Middleton – a book seller who I think specialised in militaria but who had a very decent general stock. He took quite a big shop on the busy Warwick Road but didn't stay too long – I think he still trades now somewhere in Oxfordshire.

All these shops were on the south side of Birmingham and the north seemed to me to be a wilderness as far as book stores were concerned and I rarely ventured over there. The combination of Wycherley, Maxwell and Middleton were enough to keep me satisfied and, just to spice things up, some smaller shops came and went in Moseley, Kings Heath or Bearwood and I was tireless in combing the streets looking for more and more. I was insatiable in a way that seems to me now like a fever.

Looking back at these years of the 70s and 80s I see now that I wasn't a book 'collector' – I was a book accumulator. I bought to read but also because acquiring the book was like capturing the ideas and the intellectual excitement the book and its author represented. I bought on reputation and other people's assessment of greatness – only discovering much later that I didn't like or couldn't read so much of what I gathered. The bookshops of Birmingham at this time were a perfect way for me

Booking in Birmingham

to build my library but my lack of discrimination led me to pack it with quantity rather than quality.

Whatever mistakes I made when I was buying books in these early years were all secondary to a much more important factor – just how much I loved being in these shops. On occasions I would arrive and find that, for some perfectly good reason, the shop was not opening that day and this would crush me, putting me in a sulk for the whole day. I still (literally) dream about going to and being in these shops and if someone ever talks about going to their ‘happy place’ I know exactly where mine would be. Stereotypically my bookshop dreams are all filled with an improbable sunshine and a sense of extraordinary well-being.

However, in truth I also never realised that the bookshops of Birmingham were actually in a very perilous state – for a city of its size, the range of second hand dealers was very limited and there was no real book culture I personally ever encountered. There has not been, as far as I’m aware, an established antiquarian dealer in the city – unless they pre-dated my book buying obsession. The dealers that did brave Birmingham’s chill literary winds must have been operating on tiny margins and as shop rents rose they gradually succumbed.

Stephen Wycherley held on for as long as he could but he too eventually wrapped his business up and moved out leaving a notice in the window that read ‘That’s All Folks!’. And it was. Birmingham now has no second hand bookshop and no independent dealer – anyone wanting second hand books now has to rely pretty much exclusively on charity outlets like Oxfam. Even those wanting to buy new books have found the climate pretty dreadful and can only rely on one city centre branch of Waterstones and a modest new Foyles in the redeveloped New Street Station.

I too have left Birmingham and I do my book shopping in places like Malvern, Cheltenham, Bath and Oxford where bookshops not only survive but show signs of flourishing. I really can’t explain why it is that Birmingham has become such a book-lovers desert but I can’t help but feel that with virtually no competition there must be enough book-lovers in the city to make a well-run second-hand bookshop work.

If there are any investors out there thinking they’d like to take a chance, I’m ready to have a discussion with them...



Contributors

Jane Allcroft

Jane is currently studying for MRes in Sexuality and Gender Studies at University of Birmingham. She is particularly interested in issues of Gender, Androgyny, Queer and Trans theories, Feminism, Post-structuralism, Contemporary literature, Modernism and alternative education. Jane is also a part-time Writing Mentor at Newman University and in her spare time she likes gardening, DIY, hill-walking and spending time with friends. She is always surrounded by books.

Janet Beniston

Janet Beniston is a retired physiotherapist from Preston who developed a love of books and reading from her father who was a Methodist minister.

Jane Beniston

Jane Beniston is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education and Care at Newman University, Birmingham. Loves books and book shops! "You can never have enough books?!"

Jo Bowers

Jo Bowers is Principal Lecturer in Primary Education at Cardiff Metropolitan University and has previously been a primary school teacher for twenty years. Jo has a lifelong love of books, reading and children's literature.

Barbara Argent

When she left school in 1946, Barbara Argent worked for several years as a clerk at Faber and Faber in London. Now living a quiet retired life in Dorchester, she continues to enjoy poetry, fiction and avidly reading the daily newspaper

Beverley Brenna

Beverley Brenna PhD is a Professor in Curriculum Studies at the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Canada. Her research interests involve literacy learning, with a focus on reading comprehension, special education, and Canadian children's literature. She has published twelve books for young people (for more about her work, see www.beverleybrenna.com).

Contributors

Margaret M Clark

Margaret M. Clark is Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Birmingham and Visiting Professor at Newman University, UK. She has been engaged in publishing her rigorous research for over half a century. She continues to write about literacy education and her self-published *Learning to be Literate*, which uniquely analyses research into literacy approaches from the 1960s through to 2015, won the prestigious UK Literacy Association Book Award for 2015. A fully revised edition is to be published by Routledge in March 2016.

Kevin Crossley-Holland

Kevin Crossley-Holland writes poems, translates from Anglo-Saxon, reworks traditional tale and writes prizewinning historical fiction for children. He has collaborated with the artists Norman Ackroyd and James Dodds and many composers including Nicola LeFanu, Bob Chilcott and Bernard Hughes. He is an Honorary Fellow of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and President of the School Library Association.

Steve Dixon

Steve Dixon is a confirmed bibliophile and ex-librarian who now works as a Senior Lecturer at Newman University, Birmingham. In his spare time, you are quite likely to find him in charity shops.

Yushra Fatima

Having just finished studying Early Childhood Education and Care at Newman University, 20-year-old Yushra Fatima now divides her time between several interests; namely being a volunteer, an artist and a writer. Spending many months volunteering at a private nursery as well as a primary school where Yushra worked with children with a range of needs, she aspires to become a mainstream primary school teacher before hoping to train as a teacher of the deaf. Having completed her dissertation on picture-books and how they have evolved over the years in terms of the portrayal of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) individuals, Yushra hopes to build on this research to examine how the portrayal of disability in picture-books have evolved since the early 20th century. Her other areas of interest include children's literature, special educational needs, safeguarding children and equal rights for BME families.

Alan Gibbons

Alan Gibbons has been writing children's and Young Adult fiction for twenty-six years. He is the winner of The Blue Peter Book Award 2000 'The book I couldn't put down' for his best-selling book Shadow of the Minotaur and has won seventeen other awards. He has twice been shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal.

Before becoming an author Alan was a teacher for 16 years. Alan is a full time writer and independent educational consultant. He is the organiser of the Campaign for the Book which promotes libraries and the culture of reading for pleasure. Alan visits 150-180 schools and libraries a year in the UK and abroad, working with young people to encourage their interest in reading and writing.

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Katrina Jan

Reading and writing has been a passion of mine since I was a child and over the years that passion has grown. When I was an infant the covers of books used to attract me, anything that stood out amongst the shelves and looked quite out of the ordinary I just had to read. As I got slightly older I decided to read books by authors who I knew I enjoyed. From the likes of Roald Dahl to Meg Cabot and Anne Fine, these were the types of books I wanted to read during my childhood, as I could rely on the writer to keep me engaged and entertained. As I grew up, I wanted to expand my reading. Therefore, I would rely on the blurb of a book to find out whether this novel would interest me. Overtime I developed my knowledge on books and found out what I liked and disliked. Now I am more interested in Victorian Literature, although I do read other books, I tend to collect the classics as they are my favourites, such as Dickens, Austen and Bronte. In regards to writing, I take pleasure in creating poetry, which I upload onto my blog for people to read. I have also had several works published with an organisation called 'Young Writers' and I hope to do more in the near future.

Bruce Johns

Bruce Johns is a writer of fiction and creative non-fiction. The first instalment of a family history is due out this year along with a volume of nature writing. Further information about these and other projects can be found at brucejohns.co.uk

Skecia Mardenborough

Skecia Mardenborough is a final year student on the 'Working With Children, Young People and Families' programme, at Newman University, Birmingham. She is interested in social justice causes such as human trafficking, poverty, isolation and loneliness in old age. She helps others in her community, by volunteering at a food bank, advocating for an elderly family friend and reading with Key Stage 1 pupils. During quieter periods of her studies she works as a part-time Presenter delivering safety workshops to children and young people. She aims to progress onto postgraduate study upon completion of her degree.

Contributors

Kate Maryon

I was born in London in 1963 into a chaotic environment where I met with more than my fair share of poverty, violence and abuse. Our family landscape was dominated by terror; silenced by secrets and lies. I closed in on myself, using all my limited resources attempting to maintain a sense of internal and external peace. My dad left us when I was ten, but it took years to unravel from the trauma he'd caused. I also suffered sexual abuse as a child, from other family members, and this was salt in the wound, extra bricks for my internal castle. Books helped, of course, and writing – they became a vehicle for expressing my troubled emotions and learning to transform difficulty into potential. Read more about Kate's background on

<http://www.katemaryon.com>

Julian Nangle

Julian Nangle is a bookseller and psychotherapist. He has worked in the rare book trade for 48 years, starting his own business 42 years ago trading under the name Words Etcetera. 10 years ago he sold his last shop together with the trading name of Words Etcetera and now works at home, issuing catalogues and selling on the internet under the name Nangle Rare Books. His website is www.nanglerarebooks.co.uk

Terry Potter

After leaving school in 1971 I became a full-time bookseller at Hudson's Bookshop in Birmingham. I left to go to university but returned on a regular basis in university holidays. Although I went on to have a range of other jobs in the public and voluntary sector, books have stayed an integral part of my life because I consider myself a voracious reader and collector. I was the founder of Books For Change – a voluntary project promoting books and reading in the early 2000s – and I am now a senior lecturer at Newman University and the co-founder of The Letterpress Project.

Mary Rochford

Mary Rochford was born and grew up in Dublin. She has spent most of her adult life in Birmingham, England, where she read English and History at the University of Birmingham. She obtained a Masters in Literary Studies at Birmingham City University and has worked as a lecturer in Further Education. Her collection of short stories, *Gilded Shadows*, was longlisted for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and won Birmingham City Library Readers' Book for Birmingham Award. She published her novel, *Niamh Takes Ulysses Home*, in 2010. Her trilogy of short plays, *Breaking Free*, *All's Fair ...* and *The Dancer is The Dance*, has been performed to much acclaim at The Old Joint Stock Theatre and The Crescent Theatre, Birmingham. For further information visit: www.maryrochford.co.uk

Alun Severn

Alun Severn entered the book trade as a trainee bookseller with Hudson's Bookshop, Birmingham, in early 1973. Throughout the period to mid-1985 he worked his way up to Deputy Shop Manager, responsible for managing general, hardback fiction, arts and humanities, children's, reference, paperbacks, Penguin and mass market stock and sales, and in the region of fifty staff. He left Hudson's in 1985 and joined Third World Publications, a small co-operative marketing and distributing radical and campaigning literature and specialising in third world development issues.

In 1989 he left TWP and joined Burchell & Martin Ltd, a specialist academic, institutional and library supply business. He left the book trade in early-1993 making a complete change of career direction into community economic development and, from 1997, freelance consulting, specialising in research, development, policy and evaluation for the third sector and social enterprise.

He has written extensively about the third sector, volunteering issues, social enterprise development, and policy issues relevant to these sectors.

Ria Amber Tesia

Ria Amber Tesia is an award-winning author, food critic, Best of Bolton Winner (2012 – 2014) and Patron of Reading. She is a prolific reader, cook and food writer, frequently trialling recipes in her test kitchen in Derby and featuring them on her foodie blog. She is currently working hard on her debut cookbook whilst putting the finishing touches to the sequel of her debut novel, Screaming Snowflakes. She is a passionate foodie reviewing restaurants world-wide and loves championing great reads, wholesome food and great spaces. To find out more about Ria, hop onto website www.riaambertesia.com or stalk her on Twitter @Amber_Tesia.

Viv Wheatley

I was born in London where I was surrounded by second hand book shops. My local in Swiss Cottage was where I bought text books for college and cheap penguin novels. I read these instead of studying and remember being immersed in *The Rains Came* by Louis Bromfield .

I went to Easthampstead Park in Berkshire for primary teacher training and a main course in literature. From there I taught in Paddington for a year before coming to Birmingham and teaching for two years. I wanted a change from teaching and worked at Hudson's Book shop which was a real experience in a world outside education. After a few months I returned to teaching and became deputy head at James Watt infants. In the 90s I took a year out and went to Australia . (I'm adding this to show I'm not completely boring!) I retired early from ill-health but was lucky enough to be involved with conference planning and adult training. I loved this but again ill health intervened.

I now have no connection to education but have time to read lots and enjoy my craft hobbies. www.vivsdesigns.co.uk

Bookshop Memories Revisited

The 80th anniversary of the publication of George Orwell's *Bookshop Memories* falls in 2016 and for us here at The Letterpress Project this seemed a good excuse to ask our friends and supporters to provide us with their own bookshop memories to redress the balance.

What they've produced is an array of experiences that takes us from the life of the professional bookseller to the concerns of the obsessive collector, from local favourite shops to exotic overseas locations and from the aesthetic to the political. Reading this collection will give you anything from a momentary thought about a special time, a paean for something lost, a time of your youth recollected in tranquillity or a more thoughtful, bookish analysis of the forces shaping the bookshop experience.

Most of all we hope that all this collection will bring a smile to your face and help you remember your own bookshop experiences with affection.