

HAVE YOU HEARD THE BUZZ AROUND BOOKSHOPS?

At recent count there are 867 independent bookshops in the UK, each thriving in competitive times by offering a unique atmosphere, selection of books and specialist advice. Print is on the ascendant. With small publishers producing beautifully designed and written books, while booksellers offer events, art shows and even cocktails. There is a whole host of reasons to visit bookshops, from making meaningful connections in your community and exploring new areas when visiting other towns and cities. To get you started, here is a sampling from London for residents and visitors.

Travel back in time by visiting the row of booksellers in Cecil Court, a quiet lane around the corner from Leicester Square Station. The Gascoyne Cecil family of Hatfield House in Hertfordshire developed the street in the 18th century, and

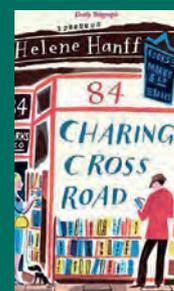
the shops today are tenants of the same family. Harry Potter tour guides tout Cecil Court as “the inspiration for Diagon Alley.” **Marchpane** takes you through the looking glass, owner Kenneth Fuller specialises in antiquarian illustrated children’s books and is the authority on Lewis Carroll’s Alice books. He offers authentic punk memorabilia for sale and displays two Daleks, so well worth a visit to this tiny quintessentially British establishment. Be sure to stop in **Watkins Books**, the oldest esoteric shop in London, opened here in 1901 when London society was fascinated by the occult and ancient Egypt. Watkins is a mind, body and spirit bookshop with relaxing ambiance, knowledgeable staff and a wide range of new books. Spend an afternoon visiting the remaining eight bookshops of Cecil Court, specialising in modern literature, art, music, travel and more.

Beauty and innovative organisa-

ICONIC BOOKSELLERS IN FILM AND TV

84, Charing Cross Road, is a collection of the droll correspondence between a London bookseller Frank Doel and American author Helene Hanff. First published in 1970, the book has been adapted many times, most famously as a 1987 film with Anthony Hopkins and Anne Bancroft.

In the comedy television series *Black Books* (2000-2004), Dylan Moran plays hilariously unpleasant bookseller Bernard Black. Co-starring Tamsin Greig and Bill Bailey, *Black Books* is part of the national consciousness.





tion of books are the trademarks of **Libreria** and **Daunt Books**. Libreria, opened in 2016 in Brick Lane, is a hipster paradise of warm yellow walls, soft seating nooks and glowing reflective surfaces, with phones strictly not allowed. Books are grouped by themes for serendipitous discovery and highlight guest curations by well-known authors. It's not all highbrow though, Libreria has a refrigerator of beer should browsing become thirsty work. Daunt Books, Marylebone is extraordinarily attractive, with Edwardian oak balconies and vaulted spaces. This bookshop's innovation is to intermingle fiction and non-fiction books and shelve them by country. Daunt Books is perfect for armchair and active travellers, and a boon for anyone looking to widen their reading horizons.

Interested in the contemporary social history of London? Visit one of the bookshops that is a community byword. **Gay's the Word** in Bloomsbury opened 39 years ago. A calm and welcoming store with two dedicated owners, Gay's the Word has also served as a destination for LGBT+ people from around the UK. Featured in the 2014 film *Pride*, the shop is accustomed to people from around the world popping in for a postcard or bestseller. **The Brick Lane Bookshop** stocks every book you'd like to read, from the newest fiction to the tastiest



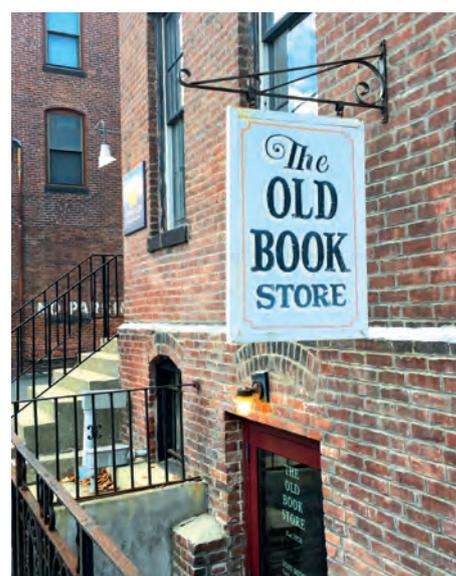
looking reprint of classics and children's books too. The extensive local history section on the East End of London hints at the bookshop's community origins as the Tower Hamlets Art Project in 1978. In Finsbury Park, **New Beacon Books** has specialised in selling and publishing African and Caribbean literature, fiction and non-fiction since 1966. Both New Beacon Books and The Brick Lane Bookshop play active roles in publishing and education. Just opened and reflecting one of the growing communities in East London is **Caravansérail**, a French and English bookshop. Co-owner Laura buys books and reads in both languages and is a fantastic person to discuss fiction in translation. Children's books, tea and coffee being available and a mission to support hybrid cultures make this a welcoming stop.

If you love treasure hunts, **Any Amount of Books** on Charing Cross Road is the perfect place to start. Crammed full of second hand books, Any Amount prides itself on the quick turnover of its eclectic stock, much of which comes from estate sales. There is a £1 section in the basement, and quarterly sales clear the way for fresh books. Something of a "booksellers' bookshop", the regulars are thoughtful and will make way for you to join them in the hunt for signed copies and first editions. Across town in



Bloomsbury, **Skoob** books buys much of its second-hand stock from academics, so has a brilliant non-fiction section as well as fiction. An uncatalogued but organised shop of almost 65,000 books, you will also find a piano in the music book section and chairs to sit in as you browse. Skoob also keep busy providing books for films, theatre and photo sets.

History, treasure hunts, beauty and community are only a few of the reasons to visit independent bookshops. Booksellers are unlikely to interrupt whilst you are browsing, so ask questions to make the most of their expertise. With the ten shops described above to whet your appetite, you have 857 across the UK to discover for yourself.



Lauren LaTulip started her bookish career in New York before working for 10 years as a librarian in London. Lauren offers private and group walking tours of quirky London bookshops. Find out more at www.bluestockingbooks.co.uk