

Best Bookshops in Newcastle upon Tyne

In this bookshop guide, John Tomaney takes us on a tour of some of the best bookshops in the UK city of Newcastle upon Tyne and the wider North East. If there's a bookshop that you think others should visit in a particular city, further information about contributing follows this article.



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Newcastle upon Tyne is England's handsomest city. Arranged around a gorge, crossed by historic bridges and centred on John Dobson's nineteenth-century classically designed new town, there is plenty to admire. But how does it serve the bibliophile? Central Newcastle lacks an independent general bookshop of merit, but the city is served by public transport that makes book browsing a highly enjoyable possibility.

One option is to take the Metro – Newcastle’s rapid transit system – eastwards along the north bank of the River Tyne, out toward the North Sea coast. Alight at the ancient port of North Shields for the estimable [Keel Row Books](#). The knowledgeable owners specialise in signed, rare and antiquarian books, fine bindings, literature and modern first editions, children’s books and works on the history and topography of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle, but the bookshop offers even more.

A trip to North Shields can easily be combined with a visit to the nearby seaside town of Whitley Bay – either a couple of stops further on the Metro or a pleasing stroll via parts of the River Tyne Trail and the England Coast Path, taking in the Fish Quay, Tynemouth Priory and Castle and other sights. At Whitley Bay you will find [the bound](#), a recently opened independent bookshop.



Or take the train westwards, from Newcastle Central Station, for a 30-minute trip along the Tyne Valley to the former Roman settlement and Northumberland market town of Corbridge. Here, among a clutch of art galleries, pubs and cafes, you will find [Forum Books](#), located in an old chapel in the marketplace, mother bookshop of the bound in Whitley Bay. A trip to Corbridge can be combined with a visit to Hexham, served by train but also accessible by a two-hour walk from Corbridge via the River Tyne Trail. Here, the independent [Cogito Books](#) is the main attraction, tucked down a lane near the twelfth-century Abbey. Altogether, an agreeable day trip.



A trip northward to Alnwick is another possibility. Getting there by public transport is more of a challenge. There are buses from central Newcastle but it’s a 90-minute journey. A quicker alternative is the train to nearby Alnmouth before catching a connecting bus. Or, from Alnmouth station enjoy a two-hour walk along the banks of the River Aln to Alnwick. The prize is a visit to one of the largest secondhand bookshops in the world, the legendary [Barter Books](#). Housed in a Victorian former railway station, you could spend all day here perusing its vast offering, especially as it contains a convenient café. In the town centre, in the shadow of Alnwick Castle, is the newly minted [Accidental Bookshop](#), another offspring of Forum Books.

Back in Newcastle, book-browsing options are limited. [Books for Amnesty](#) on Westgate Road, not far from the Central Station, offers a possibility. In St Andrew's Street, [The Back Page](#) is a specialist sports bookshop, while [The New Bridge Project bookshop](#), part of an artist's colony in Shieldfield outside the city centre, stocks art and culture titles. Forum Books also has a presence at the nearby [Biscuit Factory](#), which showcases the work of local artists and has a café with a view of the famous [Byker Wall](#).

Ardent bibliophiles must make two pilgrimages. [Seven Stories](#), the National Centre for Children's Books, is a museum and visitor centre dedicated to children's literature and based in the Ouseburn Valley, a gentrifying former industrial area just beyond the city centre. This is a place to entertain any [bairns](#) you might have with you. Finally, Newcastle is home to the magnificent [Lit&Phil](#), one of England's oldest independent libraries, founded in 1793 and occupying its present site since 1825 which, conveniently, is a short walk from the Central Station. It was the seat of the [Northumbrian enlightenment](#) in the nineteenth century when Tyneside was a byword for industry and enterprise. It is open to all and free to explore and browse.

Note: This bookshop guide gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics and Political Science. Thank you to Keel Row Books and the Lit&Phil for providing images of their respective venues. Photographs of the Lit&Phil are by Sally Ann Norman.

Banner Image Credit: Cropped image of Lit&Phil bookshelves taken by Sally Ann Norman.

Image Two Credit: '[Barter Books in Alnwick, Northumberland](#)' by [Alan Stanton](#) licensed under [CC BY SA 2.0](#).



Do you have a favourite bookshop? If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit, then this is your chance to tell us all about it.

As part of a [regular feature](#) on *LSE Review of Books*, we're asking academics and students to recommend their favourite two or three bookshops in a particular city, with the aim of building an exciting online series for our book-loving community of readers the world over.

Bookshops could be academic, alternative, multilingual, hobby-based, secret or underground institutions, secondhand outlets or connected to a university. We'd like to cover all world regions too and are particularly keen to feature cities outside of Europe and North America.

If something comes to mind, we're looking for around 150 words per bookshop, detailing why each place is a must-see. Our editorial team can then find suitable photos and links to accompany the piece, though you're welcome to supply these too. We only ask that you focus on just one city or region, and two or three bookshops within it.

Email us if you'd like to contribute: lsereviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk