

The Best Bookshops in Belfast, Northern Ireland

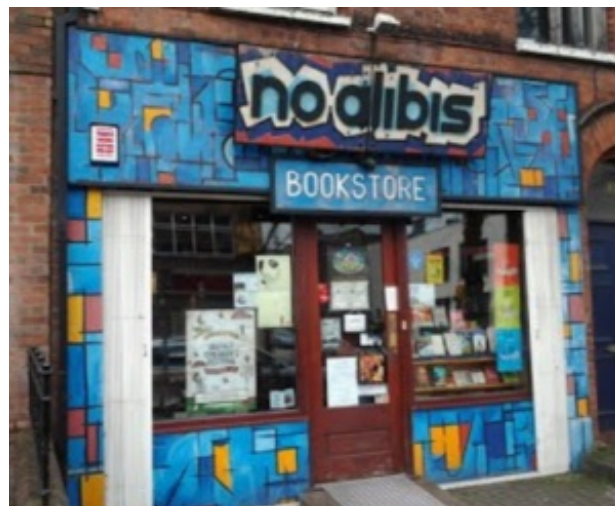
Sophie Long takes us on a tour of the best bookshops in Belfast, Northern Ireland. If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, further information about contributing follows this article.



Image Credit: Belfast City Hall (Sophie Long)

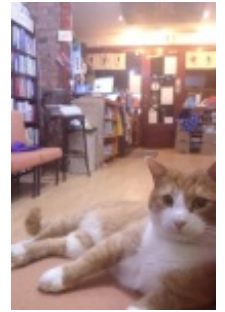
This list takes in three bookshops dispersed across the North, South and centre of Belfast, a city emerging from violent conflict but one imbued with history, a particularly politicised population and world-class writers, artists and scholars. A weekend visit or short conference stay would be all the more enjoyable for spending a few hours visiting these book stores.

The first is located beside Queen's University, in the leafy suburbs of South Belfast, whose student quarter, Botanic Avenue, has a number of excellent used bookshops run by charitable organisations. **No Alibis**, however, is a unique shop used by local academics and writers for book launches, where discounted copies are often on sale. There is also a diverse fiction section, with the latest publications snapped up quickly. Linked to the University, students receive 10% discount, and copies of scholarly texts are available throughout the year. No Alibis also hosts poetry readings and musical performances, and David, who runs the store, will order in copies of books and provide advice on request. Regulars also claim that the free tea and coffee enhances their browsing.



Cutting across the city, the next place to visit is **The Bookstore**,

on 21 Lower North Street, which is a short walk from Belfast's Cathedral Quarter, a redeveloped area full of decent bars and restaurants. The Bookstore is Belfast's own version of Black Books, albeit with a much friendlier service. Books are separated by category, and not much else. Often two-deep, some digging is required if you're looking for a specific text. However there are bargain academic textbooks, rare copies and signed books to be found if you can afford to spend some time here. There is a particularly good section on Irish history and politics, with copies of works from the early 1970s which can't be found online. A brilliant way to spend an afternoon, The Bookstore is a truly unique and chaotic experience.



Finally, from the centre to the North of the city, we finish at the newest store on the list. **Belfast Books**, on 112 York Road (just over a mile from Belfast city centre) is a locally-owned, independent bookshop, which has been open for just over a year. However, Belfast Books is much more than a bookshop. Located in a particularly deprived ward of Belfast, it is a site of community learning, discussions and capacity-building. The owner, a local, was concerned that the area be normalised, as opposed to gentrified, so that it remained a part of the community in which he grew up. Issues with Protestant working-class educational attainment have been widely researched, and Belfast Books is a grassroots step towards addressing some of those issues. Highly recommended, an hour in this spot is an hour well spent. John has a creative writing class and is planning blog-writing sessions and book groups for locals to attend. You can also have a chat with John about local politics, and pick up some recommendations if you're trying to get to grips with Northern Ireland's Troubles. If you head out to that side of the town, you can have a coffee and buy a few books before heading along the street for an Ulster Fry at Frydays York Road.



Each of these three bookshops is within a 5-minute drive, or (weather permitting) 25-minute walk of one another. All have their own charms, and you'll be greeted with the renowned Belfast warmth.



Sophie Long is a second-year doctoral candidate in the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy at Queen's University Belfast. She researches Ulster Loyalism, using a participatory action research methodology. Her research interests include class, non-violent strategies and group rights. [Read more LSE RB features by Sophie Long.](#)

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. Thank you to Sophie Long for providing the images for this guide.

Do you have a favourite bookshop? If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, 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, foreign language, hobby-based, secret or underground institutions, secondhand outlets or connected to a university. We'd like to cover all world regions too.

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

- Copyright 2013 LSE Review of Books