

# The best bookshops in Edinburgh

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*Canan Bolel talks us through some of the most exciting and beautiful bookshops in Edinburgh, Scotland. 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, find more information about contributing after this article.*



Stormy Calton Hill, Edinburgh. Credit: [Andy Smith](#) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

I visited Edinburgh for the first time last summer. Just like any new place, the city promised adventure and escape. I got more than I expected on the adventure and escape part, but this was not my first true encounter with the city. I had in fact already become well acquainted with Edinburgh through the works of Muriel Spark, Alexander McCall Smith and JK Rowling. My relationship with this charming city, initiated in the pages of books, once more led me to books, but this time with the accompaniment of the chilling Edinburgh rain.

I stumbled upon **The Old Children's Bookshelf** while wandering along the Royal Mile, contemplating a hot toddy. After stepping inside, I started browsing through familiar names from my childhood and I was even able to see my parents' favourite characters jumping out from the dusty shelves. After going through the pages of Peter Pan, Winnie-the-Pooh or Peter Rabbit, visitors can also flip through the creased pages of old comics.

Composed of two small rooms filled with the smell of old books, The Old Children's Bookshelf is very cozy. With shelves full of books in every colour you can imagine, it became clear that this wonderful place is of course not just for children, but for sentimental adults too. This small shop with friendly staff was a highlight of my trip, and I'll continue to treasure my copy of *Scottish Folk and Fairy Tales*.



Credit: [Seek New Travel](#) CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

To the south of Edinburgh Castle and above the Grassmarket you will find **Armchair Books**, which is definitely one of the best spots in Edinburgh for bibliophiles. Here, walls are covered with books and on those that are not you can see interesting quotes written on small pieces of paper, posters and book covers turning this place into a 'literary space' in the strictest sense. Portable ladders, shaky lighting and handwritten labels on the shelves all add to the charming atmosphere.

This appealing chaos (which definitely has a harmony within) creates a distinct contrast when compared to other serious bookstores. That is probably the reason why I find Armchair Books especially pleasant. Although they specialize in classics and poetry, I would highly recommend having a look at their contemporary play and science fiction collections.

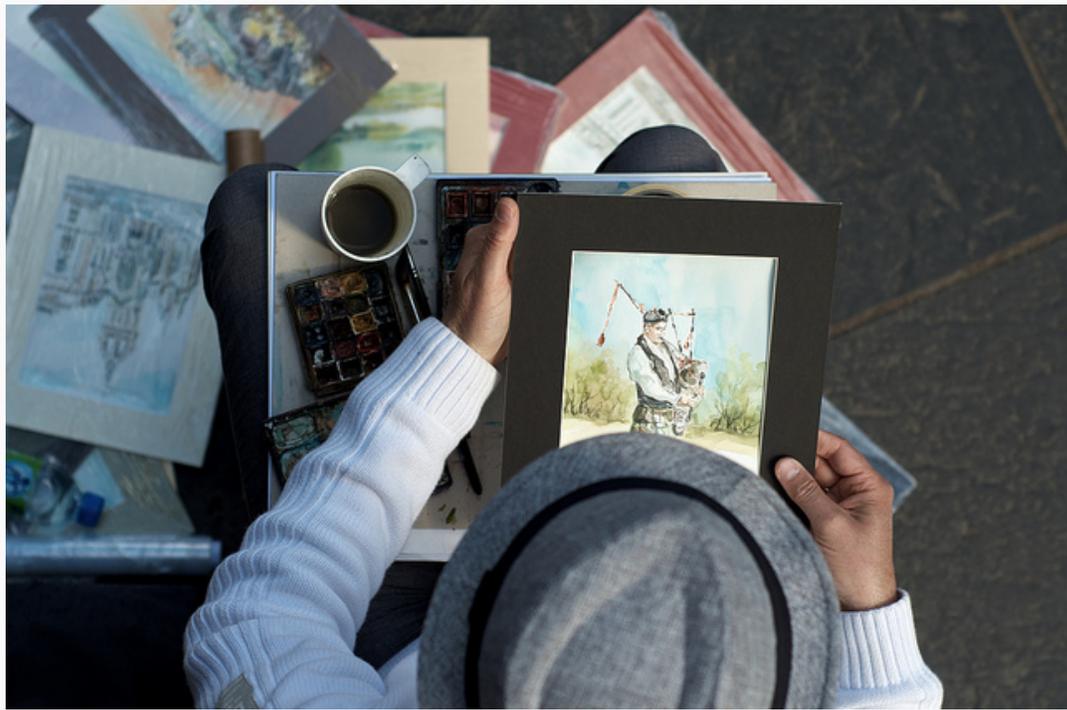


Arcmchair Books. Credit: [Dutch Simba](#) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

On West Nicolson Street, **Word Power Books** is nearly impossible to pass with its bright purple facade. Since 1994, this bookshop has been popular within Edinburgh's leftist activist scene. In addition to their splendid selection of books focusing on political science, cultural studies and social justice, this bookshop also hosts events and holds readings open to public.

The shop is also known for its support for local writers. Thus, their selection of Scottish literature from past to present is really worth exploring. Those interested in literary theory can choose among a wide selection of anthologies and explore further by jumping to their selection on gender and identity. Although I was not fortunate enough to see, a friend of mine told me that instead of the iconic bookshop cat, Word Power Books has an adorable collie, who has a whole coterie of admirers.

The famous Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson once said, "I kept always two books in my pocket; one to read, one to write in." If your pockets are empty, the stores around Edinburgh will surely deliver some inspiration in a truly beautiful setting.



Credit: [Thomas Leuthard](#) CC BY 2.0

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**Canan Bolel** has a Masters degree in Political Science from Sabanci University, Istanbul, a masters degree in Sociology from London School of Economics and Political Science. Currently, Canan is a PhD student in Near and Middle Eastern Studies Program at the University of Washington. Her research examines the formations urban identity and sense of belonging in Mediterranean port cities of the Ottoman Empire.

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**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 now's your chance to tell us all about it.**

As part of a new 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, second hand 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 this 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](mailto:lsereviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk)**

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