

The Best Bookshops in St Andrews, Scotland

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Sneha Reddy takes us on a tour of the best bookshops in **St Andrews, Scotland**. If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, further information about contributing follows this article.



Image Credit: St Andrews, Scotland (Ronnie MacDonald CC BY 2.0)

A Guide to Bookshops in 'The Bubble'

The seaside town of St Andrews, often called 'the bubble' by students for being a world of its own, is located 50 miles from Edinburgh in the east of Scotland. Its recorded history goes back to the Dark Ages, when a town called Kilrymont is said to have existed on the site of what is now St Andrews. Its Cathedral was built in 1160, while the University was founded in 1413. The town's motto is '*Dum Spiro Spero*' or 'while I breathe, I hope'—perhaps a reference to its turbulent political history. Although best known for its magnificent golf courses, the town's medieval character and its bloody sixteenth-century past breathes deeply into the present, particularly in its historic centre which is made up of three streets, unsurprisingly named 'North Street', 'Market Street' and 'South Street'. Visitors are often golfers or friends and family of the town's 17,000 residents, of which students from the university make up 8,000. As of 2017, there are six booksellers and several charity shops that sell secondhand books. This short piece is a window into three of those bookshops.

Bouquiniste

31 Market Street, KY16 9NS

Specialising in antiquarian and second-hand books

In 1979, a young Bill Anderson began selling books from a street stall in St Andrews and discovered that he enjoyed meeting people and trading books enough to open a bookshop. Three years later in 1982, Bill managed to set up **Bouquiniste**. He promises that 'one can find books of all kinds here, except Mathematics', but adds, 'unless, of course, you are looking for a history of Mathematics'. Books fill all sides of the shop while some beautiful sketches of scenes from the town, including a colourful painting of a young Bill himself standing next to a busy bookstall, made by Bill's daughter, adorn the wall beside the cashier's desk. Located at the end of Market Street, *Bouquiniste* is small and offers a unique collection of books and postcards that many will find fascinating to browse through. After a visit to the *Bouquiniste*, if you are in search of a place to sit with your new purchase, **North Point Café**, a short walk from the shop, is the perfect next stop for some reading as well as tea and cake.



Topping and Company Booksellers

7 Greyfriars Garden, KY16 9HG

Home of the St Andrews literary festival

Residents of St Andrews are most likely to first recommend **Topping & Co.** to their guests, and one can be certain that a visit to the bookshop will easily exceed expectations. Established in 2014 by Robert Topping and his wife, both alumni of the University of St Andrews, the bookstore has since hosted interesting literary events in the town, in addition to monthly book launches, and gives its visitors a chance to buy original author-signed copies. Robert describes the collection at *Topping & Co.* as 'cosmopolitan and international', with dedicated sections for subjects such as golf. The store is remarkably large and its walls are lined with shelves full of books up to the roof, reminiscent of *Shakespeare & Company in Paris* without, of course, the rustic feel that is typical of an old bookshop. It makes up for this with its warm environment.



Topping & Co. is most beautiful in the winter months when the sun sets early and the warm yellow light from its front window falls on the street in front. The lovely part about *Topping & Co.* is that one need not look for a café nearby because the staff offer a choice of free hot teas and coffees to all their visitors. Nevertheless, if you prefer to step out for a warm drink afterwards, **Taste Café**, with its cosy ambience just around the corner, is a favourite.

J&G Innes Ltd

Stationers, booksellers, art suppliers and gift shop

107 South Street, KY16 9QW

This bookshop is impossible to miss because of the remarkably beautiful building in which it is located. The architecture itself is worth taking a couple of moments to admire. **J&G Innes Ltd.** is a family-run enterprise that has been passed on through four generations. It was in 1879 that John Innes first set up his publication business, and in 1927 his firm purchased the corner shop which is now *J&G Innes Ltd.*, selling books, stationery, art supplies and gifts. The store is large but has far fewer books than one might expect. It does, however, have a beautiful range of children's books and local publications that are unique to the store. The old front section of the shop has a beautiful staircase made of Scottish oak which leads into an art gallery—unsurprisingly called 'Upstairs'—where one can find local artworks depicting everyday scenes from the Scottish town and its neighbouring fishing villages. Light from the windows fills up the gallery space, giving it an airy feel, and the glass windows offer a beautiful view of South Street. Close to *J&G Innes Ltd.* is the local favourite, **Jannettas Gelateria**, where you can enjoy your recent purchase with homemade gelato ice-cream.



When it comes to what makes a good bookshop, Innes, from *J&G Innes Ltd.*, says it is one which provides space for good local literature; Anderson, from *Bouquiniste*, describes it as one that surprises its visitors with the titles they might unexpectedly find; Topping, from *Topping & Co.*, identifies it in the large diversity of books, which one can find stacked all the way up to the roof in his shop. And, of course, great coffee. Memories of a good bookshop rarely fade away completely. The three bookshops listed in this piece, each owned by independent booksellers, are bound to quickly earn a special place in a visitor's memories of St Andrews.

Other bookstores in town include **Waterstones** on Market Street and **Blackwell's** in the University Student Association Building. **Barnardo's**, which has plenty of secondhand titles, is one of the many charity bookshops dotted along the town's main streets. St Andrews has one public library situated in the middle of two lovely cafés, while the university houses two breathtakingly beautiful libraries called **Martyrs Kirk Research Library** and the **King James Library** that are worth a peek. With so many bookshops on every street, a visitor in St Andrews will not fail to miss the importance of bookshops to the people of this Scottish town.

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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 Sneha Reddy for providing the images of the bookshops featured in 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

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