

The Best Bookshops in Boston and Cambridge, MA, USA

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseviewofbooks/2017/06/02/the-best-bookshops-in-boston-and-cambridge-ma-usa/

2017-6-2

Dr David Cowan takes us on a tour of the best bookshops in **Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts**. 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: Boston Common Fountain ([Eric Kilby CC BY SA 2.0](#))

The Best Bookshops in Boston and Cambridge, MA, USA

Boston has 35 colleges, universities and community colleges, as well as around 152,000 students, so you won't be surprised to learn there are some very good bookstores with historical connections. You can scout around Boston and then head over the river to Cambridge, home of Harvard University and MIT. In Cambridge, you'll also find yourself in one of the USA's [sanctuary cities](#), so if you're from overseas you can refuse to leave and spend your time in its bookstores; though at the time of writing, [President Trump has vowed to eliminate this status](#).

Brattle Book Shop

9 West Street, Downtown Boston, MA 02111

The oldest bookstore, and my personal favourite, has to be the Brattle Book Shop, founded in 1825 and in the hands of the Gloss Family since 1949. Your visit in warmer weather will start outside in a parking lot full of bookcases brimming with books of all kinds. Here you'll find books arranged into \$1, \$3 and \$5 shelving sections, and some gems amongst them. There is very little subject order, so you have to scan every shelf if you're going to find something to put a knowing smile on your face. You can then enter the store itself, which is on three levels. I've found a number of signed editions here to add to my collection. You'll mostly find fiction, cookery and Americana on the ground floor; one flight up are academic subjects, including philosophy, religion, US politics and history, drama and other subjects. Their rare book room on the third floor has first editions, collectibles and fine leather bindings.



Commonwealth Books

9 Spring Ln, Boston, MA 02109

A five-minute brisk walk will get you to **Commonwealth Books** on the oldest street in Boston, built in 1630 near the site of the Boston massacre. Commonwealth Books is smaller than Brattle Book Shop, but it has a broad inventory including rare editions, antique prints and maps, so this is less of a place to bulk buy. It is particularly strong on art and history, but has a good selection of most subjects. There is a comfy chair or two by the fireplace to spend time considering potential purchases, though sadly Leo, the bookstore cat, will no longer rub up against you: he died on 17 May 2017.



Harvard Book Store

1256 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge

Prize among the stores in Cambridge is the **Harvard Book Store**, an independent since 1932. A handsome selection of new books is on the ground floor, with remaindered or secondhand books in the basement. They also have one of the most extensive author event series you'll find in the Boston area. Hey, they even have a loyalty card scheme! Surrounded by the university and coffee shops, this is a great place to browse.



There are plenty of others to check out. In Cambridge, there is the **Harvard Coop** and a great little poetry bookstore called **Grolier Poetry Book Shop**, just around the corner from the Harvard Bookstore. You'll also find some gems at **Raven Used Books**. Back in Boston on fashionable Newbury Street, you'll find **Trident Booksellers & Café**, which despite having a smaller selection of books and magazines, is a good place to meet up with friends or grab brunch. Further out of Boston towards my own university is a great little indie bookstore **Brookline Booksmith**, only steps away from a T-stop (our metro) and Trader Joe's, so a great evening place to buy books and groceries!

Dr David Cowan is a Visiting Scholar at Boston College. He is currently completing a book on Saudi Arabia. His book on the Chicago economist *Frank H. Knight: Prophet of Freedom* (Palgrave Macmillan) was published last year. He is on twitter @dfcowan.

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 David Cowan 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

- Copyright 2013 LSE Review of Books