

# RADICAL BOOKSELLING HISTORY

Newsletter

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# Editorial

We are pleased to bring you another newsletter from our project on the history of radical bookselling. And this time it's a bumper 50 page edition, with four substantial articles:

- The first part of a history of Publications Distribution Co-operative, written by those who were involved, plus a couple of personal reminiscences
- A history of the Independent Bookshop in Sheffield
- Another account of a 19th century radical bookseller, this time the indomitable Richard Carlile.
- Recollections of fascist attacks on Mushroom Books in Nottingham - and how they were resisted.

We have information on an exhibition held in Aberdeen about Boomtown Books, a book review of a new US publication *The Radical Bookstore: Counterspace for Social Movements* by Kimberley Kinder and links to a new book on the history of Freedom Press, an article on Public House Bookshop in Brighton and an update on the innovative project recording the history of 5 Caledonian Road, home of Housmans bookshop.

A record of many years of commitment to radical bookselling is shown in the obituaries linked in this issue, (Jon Carpenter, Mike Don, Tenebris Light and Jan Seed) but these deaths also show the urgency of collating our history and archiving radical book trade material before it is lost. We are continuing our oral history interviews with ex-bookshop workers and plan to report in more detail on this in future newsletters. To our knowledge, other groups are working on the history of Grass Roots Books in Manchester, Wedge in Coventry, York Community Books and First of May in Edinburgh - are there others?

If you can offer us material for a future issue or have any material relating to the radical book trade please contact our group by email:

[leftontheshelf@phonecoop.coop](mailto:leftontheshelf@phonecoop.coop)

*Dave Cope, John Goodman, Rick Seccombe and Maggie Walker*

*Radical Bookselling History Group*

This Newsletter, and previous issues, can be downloaded from:  
[www.leftontheshelfbooks.co.uk](http://www.leftontheshelfbooks.co.uk) (Research Pages tab)

**Dave Cope**

Progressive Books 1975-85;  
Central Books 1986-2004;  
LOTS 1992 to date

[leftontheshelf@phonecoop.coop](mailto:leftontheshelf@phonecoop.coop)

**John Goodman**

Wedge Co-operative  
1977-79; PDC/Southern  
Distribution 1979-80

[john.goodman@phonecoop.coop](mailto:john.goodman@phonecoop.coop)

**Rick Seccombe**

Grass Roots 1974-79;  
Scottish & Northern  
1979-83; Frontline Books  
1990-95

[rick@care4free.net](mailto:rick@care4free.net)

**Maggie Walker**

Grass Roots 1976-1982  
[maggiwalker101@gmail.com](mailto:maggiwalker101@gmail.com)

*Design and typesetting*  
*Ben Goodman*

# Publications Distribution Co-operative: The Early History (1975–1979)

Chas Ball, David Berry, Charles Landry, Alison Read

Publications Distribution Co-operative (PDC) was established in 1976 as a part of the development of left wing and feminist publishing in the early 1970s and an expansion in the number of independent radical bookshops and bookstalls. It aimed to help the growing ranks of radical book, pamphlet and magazine publishers to reach audiences across Britain and Ireland and to give those audiences easier access to radical publications.



It operated from 1976 to 1984, handling a wide range of radical, ecological and feminist books, pamphlets and periodicals and it also developed a service to independent newsagents, particularly in London and other big cities.

## The politics of the seventies

The 1970s was a time of political ferment, change and disruption: black and anti-racist movements, feminism, lesbian and gay politics, ecological and green politics and a rapid growth of interest in left politics in all its variety. It was also a time of expansion of ideas and possibilities; there was huge enthusiasm for the possibility of change.

Because of this, there was a remarkable upsurge in the production of radical literature, which provided PDC with the supply of material to distribute, while its existence encouraged groups to produce more. By making this material more easily available, PDC enabled the rapid expansion of the radical booktrade – bookshops, printers, publishers, typesetters, designers, and even other distributors – thus giving many more readers access to a wider range of radical material.

And, to complete the circle, this upsurge in activism generated not only customers for radical material but people who wanted to set up and work in bookshops, printers, publishers, typesetters, designers – and of course distributors.

## Print technology

It was an interesting technological moment, between the eras of traditional typesetting and printing – slow, expensive, inflexible – and the modern electronic, virtual, Internet era. The 1960s and 1970s was the start of phototypesetting and the spread of small offset-litho printing machines, on which you could produce radical literature quickly, easily, cheaply, flexibly, and quirkily, so an organisation was needed for these publications to be physically distributed.

Prior to these developments, production and distribution of news and information within radical groups had been mainly by newsletters produced on duplicating machines such as the Gestetner – a messy and time-consuming process which did not allow for large print runs, flexible design, or durable and attractive products.



*In the garden at the back of 20 Richmond Avenue at lunchtime during the first meeting of the co-operative in June or July 1977.*

*Left, from the top: Charles Landry, Moira Turnbull, Chas Ball; centre, from the top: Gail Chester, Liz Cooper; right, from the top: Pam Isherwood, David Berry, Paul Westlake, Derek Cohen.*

*Photographer unknown*



## Access to information

Newspaper and magazine distribution in this period was limited to a narrow group of large companies – WH Smith, John Menzies and Surridge Dawson. There were also a few smaller independent wholesalers, one or two of whom, particularly Johnsons of Bath, were more open to non-traditional publishers.

Book distribution was predominantly linked to and controlled by the established traditional publishers. Many smaller towns would only have a WH Smith newsagent and stationers. Most of these outlets would not stock alternative literature.

Before the emergence of radical bookshops in this period, most outlets receptive to left wing and feminist literature were restricted to London and major cities as well as many of the academic bookshops in university towns. A few large cities had left wing or political bookshops, often aligned to a particular party or group, as well as academic bookshops where there was a university or polytechnic.

There was also a limited choice in broadcasting, with just three TV channels (Channel 4 started in 1982). Radio was dominated by a BBC output of four channels. Change in BBC radio output had been influenced by the success of pirate radio in the 1960s, which led to the creation of Radio 1 in 1967. The issuing of local independent radio licences took place in the 1970s, alongside a growing BBC local radio network.

In short, this was a period when ingenuity was required to provide the widest access to information and ideas, but in many ways, there were advantages to not having to deal with the overwhelming variety of sources that have come with the Internet.

## The emergence of radical publications

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a significant growth of radical publications, which largely established their circulation outside the formal commercial distribution networks. To reach their audience, periodicals like *Ink*, *Black Dwarf*, *International Times*, *Oz* and *Frendz* sold a lot of copies through alternative bookstalls and street sellers.

*Ink* was the brainchild of Richard Neville, *Oz*'s editor and publisher, and literary agent Ed Victor, and "attempted to bridge the gap between the hippies and the left-liberal intelligentsia of north London". In what turned

out to be a short-lived venture, owing to “under-financing and problems with the editorial team”, *Ink* billed itself as ‘the other newspaper’ and sought to appeal to a wider readership, beyond the underground counterculture, when it was first printed in 1971.

At the same time, other political developments added to the interest in independent publishing. For example, Friends of the Earth was set up (1972) and the National Union of Students set up a Community Action support project (1971) and an Environment Unit (1972).

By the mid-1970s virtually every area of education and learning, and virtually every profession and occupation, had a radical publication, and some more than one – examples include Psychology (*Ideology & Consciousness*), Science (*Radical Science Journal* and *Science for People*), philosophy (*Radical Philosophy*), alternative technology (*Undercurrents*), race (*Race and Class* and *Race Today*) and Economics (*Capital & Class*).

In the early 1970s a number of new periodicals were launched – *Spare Rib*, *Undercurrents*, *Camera work* – and as they became more popular, these publishers looked to the newstrade for distribution agreements. Initially they were not successful in getting distributed and were therefore not widely available on newsstands, although they did manage some visibility through their own distribution efforts.

Distribution was one of the challenges to growing titles like *Spare Rib* and *Undercurrents* as they became more popular. A new impetus was created by *The Leveller* collective, who articulated a need for national distribution to alternative outlets. Other radical magazines were similarly interested in effective distribution to a wider range of outlets. For them all, an organised bookshop distribution was a welcome addition to their circulation, enabling them to reach a far wider national audience. (See *Where is the Other News?* and *Here is the Other News* in notes below.)

## Planning a distribution service

PDC was the product of a series of meetings, initially by some radical bookshops and more centrally by radical publishers, held in 1975 and throughout 1976.

It became clear from these conversations across different strands of radical thinking and actions that there was an opportunity to establish a separate network for distributing radical and alternative publications – to set up a parallel infrastructure to work with publishers and bookshops and other

venues that would sell magazines, such as wholefood shops. The political importance of the movements we worked with made it obvious that an efficient network for information distribution was urgently needed.



Radical publishers of both periodicals and pamphlets formed the Radical Publications Group (RPG) in London in 1975. At a series of meetings in early 1976 RPG considered distribution issues, including the idea for a publications distribution 'co-op'. In late spring 1976 the RPG agreed to produce a feasibility study to address the need for a consolidation/distribution centre.

The feasibility study was undertaken by Russell Southwood and Chas Ball in summer 1976 and presented to an RPG meeting. Its conclusions indicated that a distribution service mainly established for pamphlets and periodicals would not be viable. However, it did illustrate that the publishers would support it and the market was expanding, particularly in the growing number of independent bookshops across Britain and Ireland. Bookshops from outside London, like Grass Roots (Manchester) needed simpler access to radical publications, rather than having to send someone to Rising Free or Housmans in London to find out what new publications there were and carry them back on the train on in their car.

*Outside 20 Richmond Avenue during the first meeting of the co-operative in June or July 1977. From left to right: Liz Cooper, Chas Ball, David Berry, Paul Westlake, Gail Chester, Moira Turnbull, Derek Cohen, Pam Isherwood, Charles Landry. The vehicle on the left was the Leyland Sherpa crewbus which a supportive collective in rural Aberdeenshire donated to the co-operative. It ended up being David Berry's vehicle in Birmingham for a year or two. Chas collected it from Aberdeen and Moira drove it down to London to add to PDC's fleet of white Renault 4 vans and a VW Transporter. The motorcycle belonged to Derek who was a keen biker.*

*Photographer unknown*

## PDC is launched

Although the plan produced was inconclusive in its recommendations to the RPG, it went ahead anyway, with personal commitments from several of the prime movers, willing to contribute time and effort. It was not clear that there was sufficient funding support for the project to be established but it moved forward with an air of optimism.

As an organiser of student bookstalls, Chas Ball already had some experience of organising distribution on a small scale in his work at SCANUS. Chas had joined the Community Action & Environment team at NUS in 1974, having earlier worked for Liberty, then known as the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL).

Other members of the initial PDC team were attracted to the project through their involvement with Radical Publications Group publishers. Gail Chester was involved with several feminist publications; Charles Landry was recommended to join by Chris Farley of Spokesman Books; Paul Westlake was involved in housing co-ops in London and later a moving spirit in co-operatives.

## Establishing a Distribution Centre in London

These four – Chas, Gail, Charles and Paul – set up PDC in autumn 1976. Distribution activities began on 15 September 1976 from a temporary distribution base in a housing co-op basement at 435 Caledonian Road, London N7. Despite unsanitary working conditions, a fortnightly ‘run’ was started to a growing number of customers – mainly radical bookshops throughout Britain – where orders already existed for the periodicals that signed up to be distributed by the coop.

The direct delivery of periodicals from London helped to service and facilitate a growing number of outlets. The regular fortnightly distribution of periodicals mainly used parcel post but orders for some cities were sent by Red Star parcels (rail) and collected by local volunteers who undertook the ‘last mile’ deliveries. In addition, Suma Wholefoods picked up parcels from Caledonian Road, and later from Clerkenwell, en route north from its London food wholesalers. These parcels were delivered to shops all over the north from its warehouse in Leeds.

In the early days, volunteers from some of the periodicals distributed by PDC turned up to assist with preparing the fortnightly run, but the early



planning was not good. PDC invoicing systems were poor and it took some time to get the operation on a remotely business-like basis. For example, early sales of van stock by team members on the road were given invoices with ad hoc invoice numbers.

Soon, pamphlets and books were added to the fortnightly 'run'. Chas Ball had started to visit bookshops with book and pamphlet samples. From September 1976, a number of book publishers appointed PDC to represent them to the book trade, which added to the revenue stream. First on board were publishers distributed by Third World Publications in Birmingham. Next was Spokesman Books, which appointed PDC to represent its range of books outside London.

By December the team quit the damp temporary base and moved to a newly constructed office and distribution centre in Clerkenwell Workshops, a former GLC stores in Clerkenwell Close. The Workshops also provided the offices of *Spare Rib*, *Community Action*, *Undercurrents*, the Feminist Library and the typesetter and printer Blackrose Press. Paul Westlake fitted out a bare space to make it work as an office and warehouse. Taking on this space was essential to the move from Caledonian Road and to improving the efficiency of PDC. And it suited the developer, Mike Franks, who needed rent income to finance the development of the rest of the building.

PDC's London operations flourished in Clerkenwell Workshops, although being a book and magazine distributor based on the 1st and 2nd floors created some additional challenges. It improved the fitness of some of the team. The use of a Slingsby trolley that could be 'walked' up and down stairs was a particular boon.

Liz Cooper joined the core collective early in 1977, soon after the move to Clerkenwell. Liz was active in A Woman's Place, Earlham Street and on the collective of *Red Rag*, a feminist periodical. Along with Charles Landry, Liz became a regular in the 'repping' and distribution of both periodicals and books in the growing London market. An additional independent wholefood distributor, Wholesome Trucking, started to distribute PDC parcels to the Midlands and North from spring 1977.

PDC covered a huge range of print materials, from one-off campaigning pamphlets to cloth bound academic books. Its main subject areas included: left politics, Third World politics, ecology/green politics, human rights, anti-racism and sexual politics.

Its magazines ranged from *The Leveller* and *Spare Rib*, produced by journalists, some of which were already tied in to limited newsagent trade distribution, to occasional periodicals linked to campaign groups, such as *Troops Out*. PDC also distributed radical academic journals, such as *Feminist Review*, *Radical Philosophy*, *Capital & Class* and *m/f*.

Each publication was submitted to the co-op collective for approval for distribution. This resulted in some long 'publications meetings' where suitability of the content and sales potential of a title or imprint was discussed. Virtually all applications were approved with one or two exceptions that were obviously contentious. PDC saw itself as deliberately pluralistic and non-sectarian.

*Unknown (probably  
a volunteer from  
Undercurrents) in PDC's  
Clerkenwell Close office.*

*Photographer unknown*



## Legal structure and ways of working

PDC was originally envisaged as a publishers' initiative, with publishers having the final say. In the early discussions it was argued by some that publishers should be part of the structure of the co-operative, but this was not the way it developed. Some of the publishers – in particular Bob Young (from *Radical Science Journal*) and David Berry (from *Radical Philosophy*) – volunteered their labour, but in the event PDC evolved into a workers' co-operative, although it did not formally register as a bona fide co-operative under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts until 20 October 1977, which created some accounting issues later on.

The core group of workers and active volunteers perceived PDC as a collective with a flat structure, no hierarchy and limited specialist roles. Publishers largely accepted a limited consultative role, although there were tensions in the formative period in early 1977, until the decision-making arrangements became more established with the creation of the workers' co-operative.

## Finances

PDC identified possibilities of foundation grants and employment support for what was a not-for-profit organisation. Funding bids in 1977, made to cover vehicle purchase and outreach development, were successful and led to support from the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Rowntree Trust. A Leyland Sherpa van was also donated and added to a fleet of white Renault 4 vans – although it needed collecting from rural Aberdeenshire. In late 1977 it became the main vehicle serving the Midlands.

PDC received wage support for expanding the team (but not for several of the core collective) from the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) as part of a job creation scheme (Special Temporary Employment Programme). It was only for one year (1978–1979), for 11 of the then 15 members of the co-operative. It was part of a commitment for MSC to earmark 1% of the STEP programme for co-operatives from Labour employment minister, Michael Foot. Employment support funding was not renewed – the assumption was that MSC staff felt that under a Conservative government (Maggie Thatcher was elected in May 1979) this was not something that could continue to be supported.

## Operations and collective working

Many of the people producing the publications distributed by PDC were not experienced publishers. Most of the workers at PDC had limited book trade and publishing experience, which meant they were learning on the job. Many of the publishers, especially those new to publishing, had not thought through how to distribute their book/magazine/pamphlet. The PDC collective spent a lot of time working with new entry publishers telling them about ISBNs, design and pricing, size and format – and how to promote sales and make their publication attractive to bookshops.

As the embryonic collective emerged there were tensions – Bob Young was particularly vocal and clashed with some of the collective, particularly Liz Cooper. Bob was from radical academia, Liz from feminist activism.

“Without this clash of politics and personalities I suspect PDC might have evolved a bit like a charitable trust, with a workers’ collective responsible to a board of trustees,” says David Berry, an early collective member who was responsible for the West Midlands operations. “In my opinion that is a pity, since that board could have provided us with very useful guidance and advice, whereas establishing PDC as a workers’ co-op left us very much on our own.”

Internal procedures developed as required, sometimes after failures in an ad hoc approach. In a growing organisation, PDC had no grievance procedures, no personnel experience and no agreed way of resolving differences. These were often personal in nature or about working styles and not about politics. The most disturbing example of this was in 1978. Internal conflict developed around personalities and productivity. As a result, one worker was asked to leave, which she did. So was another but, largely through the intervention of Liz Cooper, he stayed.

There were many examples of pioneering work challenging traditional power structures. Some revolved around devising ways of sharing roles on a rota, such as acting as receptionist (‘Mildred Luscious’). Others were challenging men’s dominance in meetings. David Berry recalls, “I remember at one meeting standing up to say something after Charles had spoken and being slapped down by Liz who said that the women in the collective were tired of men always grandstanding. She was right about this, as she was about many things – the reason why she was so influential.”



## Running a business

The collective was trying to achieve three distinct objectives that were challenging.

Firstly, PDC aimed to provide a comprehensive distribution and support service for a rapidly growing network of radical publishers, alternative bookshops, campus shops, wholefood shops and arts projects.

Secondly, it needed to break into the newstrade, dominated by a few large wholesalers, to serve the needs of growing new periodicals.

Thirdly, it aimed to establish itself as an effective distributor (and latterly wholesaler) in the book trade.

These aims required different skills and different strategies, and by keeping doing all three at the same time there was a danger of not doing any of them all that well.

*Chas Ball, unknown,  
Charles Landry, David  
Berry and Moira Turnbull  
in Richmond Avenue after  
the first meeting of the co-  
operative in June or July  
1977. The car (a DAF)  
belonged to Charles.*

*Photographer unknown*



Alongside these aims, there was a naivety and limited experience in setting up and running a business. So on business economics, the role of employers, and company legal issues, the collective was on a steep learning curve.

At the time, access to such information was far harder to obtain, and awareness of business practice was much less than today. There was no Wikipedia or Google in the 1970s to look up how things worked. Knowledge and experience of working collectively, without hierarchies, and in a co-operative was scant. The collective was devising the work methods and practices as it progressed – and not without mistakes.

## Phase two: decentralising

An early step towards serving the North and Scotland from London saw Edinburgh-based Paul Brown, a recent law graduate, taken as a ‘stringer’ to represent PDC publications and generate orders in parts more distant from London.

During 1977 it became clear that more fundamental decentralisation would be necessary to facilitate the development of regular contact with outlets in the Midlands, the north of England and Scotland. This was seen as important both politically and practically.

As a result, Liz Cooper and Chas Ball relocated to West Yorkshire in summer 1977 to develop the Northern and Scottish outlets that Paul Brown had been visiting. It developed as a complementary operation to London, with a small warehouse and office facilities at the Birchcliffe Centre in Hebden Bridge and a base in Niddry Sreet, Edinburgh. During the second half of 1977, Stella Dawson joined the northern team and in Scotland, Moira Turnbull and Kingsley Dawson established a presence in Scotland and the North East of England. Chas Ball left PDC in summer 1979.

David Berry, who had been an early participant in the RPG and a part-time volunteer, started working full-time in 1977 and set up a PDC base in his home in Birmingham to serve the Midlands.

New members joined the London collective during 1977, including Derek Cohen and Pam Isherwood. In 1978, Alison Read, Clare Yerbury and Hans Klabbers joined the London collective, initially employed under the MSC STEP scheme, which covered 11 employees.

One particularly successful collective meeting in spring 1978 saw all the London-based team travel to Hebden Bridge for a series of meetings over

the weekend, culminating in an evening of beer, darts and pool in the (former) Mount Skip pub in Old Town above the Calder Valley.

The pressure for devolution continued, but that's for the second part of this article.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to provide a complete and balanced flavour of the operation and its successes and failures during 1975–1979. We feel, however, that this article is a good start. Like many radical initiatives of the time, having no prior experience was not seen as a barrier to getting involved in a project designed to challenge the status quo, and for that PDC is to be celebrated.

An account of PDC 1979–1986 and an analysis of PDC's successes and failures will form the concluding article in this series.

## Notes

This article was prepared by Chas Ball with contributions and comments from former PDC collective members David Berry, Gail Chester, Charles Landry and Alison Read, as well as Newsletter editors Rick Seccombe and John Goodman. Sadly, Paul Westlake and Liz Cooper, referred to in the article, have died, in 2013 and 2019 respectively. Their Guardian obituaries are [here](#) and [here](#). Bob Young died in 2019. His Guardian obituary is [here](#).

Gail Chester has contributed an article, 'Sex, Race and Class: A Century of the Radical, Alternative, and Minority Booktrade in Britain' to a recent book *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, volume 7 (Cambridge University Press, 2019, £160). The section on PDC is on pages 637 to 639 and the section on radical bookshops is on pages 640 to 642.

Dave Berry, Liz Cooper, Charles Landry, *Where is the Other News?* (Minority Press Group, 1980).

Crispin Aubrey, Charles Landry, Dave Morley, *Here is the Other News* (Minority Press Group, 1980).



# A PDC day...

## Repping in Birmingham, 1979

David Berry

For much of the 20th Century, until it went bust and folded into Waterstones in the mid 1990s, the family firm of Hudson's was the largest bookshop in Birmingham. Indeed at one point in its heyday in the 1970s it spread out from its base in New St in the centre of town to satellite shops in nearby Stephenson St and Burlington Arcade. The main New St shop itself was a labyrinth that erupted over four floors with tables piled high with books which were taken down and dusted each morning by junior members of staff. Hudson's had a similarly old fashioned way of dealing with publishers' reps. We had to queue up to make appointments with the department heads – history, politics, sport, religion, etc - who would give us their order on a chit which then had to be taken to the 3rd Floor for the crucial rubber stamp by one of the shop's directors usually a Hudson family member.

One day in early January 1979, I joined half a dozen middle-aged men with nicotine fingers in the Reps' Queue. They were from established names like Penguin and Picador while I represented a mishmash of much smaller publishers that together made up PDC including pressure groups like Friends of the Earth, academic collectives such as the Conference of Socialist Economists and political organisations like the anarchist Black Flag. That was not the only difference. The other reps were in pin-stripe



*Chas Ball and Gail  
Chester, probably taken at  
20 Richmond Avenue at the  
first meeting of the  
co-operative in June or  
July 1977.*

*Photographer unknown*



suits and munched bacon sandwiches. I was dressed in my best white shirt, red tie and pressed Levi's and nibbled a humous roll. At 25 years old, I was half their age but I had already a couple of years' experience selling PDC publications to a bemused if not entirely hostile commercial world.

In my black briefcase that morning, I had covers of new titles from Spokesman Books in Nottingham (all of which seemed to argue for Worker's Control) and from Zed Press in London (I had particular hopes for *Frogs in a Well: Women in Purdah*). To these I could add *Football Hooliganism* from Interaction; a new edition of *The Equality Report* from NCCL; a couple of booklets about work hazards from Science for People; and a brand new book, *Beyond the Fragments*, a bristling feminist polemic that everybody in Clerkenwell Close seemed to think very highly of. With such appealing radical fare on offer, I felt confident I would sell something and so it proved although at one point I did struggle with *Frogs in the Well* as I tried to explain to a Hudson's director that 'Purdah' was not actually a town in India but a cultural practice. By late morning I was sitting in a café in the nearby Bull Ring, counting up orders for half a dozen different titles. I sipped my coffee, took off my jacket and released the top button of my shirt to help me shift gear and get into newsagent mode.

The Midlands News Service was a brisk shop in the heart of Birmingham's Bull Ring run by Ahmed Patel, a graduate of the University of Madras who had now become fully embedded in his family's businesses in England. Ahmed rather resented the fact that he was obliged to obtain virtually all his newspapers and magazines from one wholesaler, Menzies, who had carved up the city with W.H. Smith. And he liked dealing directly with small independent suppliers like me especially because I gave him 25% Sale or Return. He had taken *CameraWork* and *Undercurrents* already and this morning I offered him *The Leveller* and *Science for People*. 'These Levellers' he queried, 'they're not Marxists, by any chance, are they?' 'More Tony Benn supporters', I parried cheerfully. He took half a dozen.

Five minutes' walk from the Midlands News Service but in a quite different universe was Birmingham Peace Centre situated on a dual carriageway which meant there was little passing trade but at least the rent was cheap. Despite its name, the Centre functioned mainly as an eclectic radical bookshop and so took the entire PDC range apart from anything which explicitly advocated armed struggle not that there were many PDC publications that did apart perhaps from *Black Flag* but nobody took them all that seriously even Special Branch.

The Peace Centre had done particularly well with PDC's 1978 Christmas hit, *Class Struggle*, a board game designed by Bertoll Ollman, a New York Marxist who proved as successful at marketing his invention as any top graduate from Harvard Business School. I wasn't entirely sure it met with the approval of the Peace Centre's manager, Peter Kirby, a gentle young Brummie who loved classical music. But Peter appreciated the undisputed fact that *Class Struggle* did bring new customers into the shop who could then perhaps be tempted by other offerings like the books in the section on gender politics of which he was particularly proud. Peter particularly liked the subversive masculinity of two of PDC's most popular magazines at that time, *Achilles Heel* and *Gay Left* and we spent a pleasant hour over lunch debating sexual politics while I did a quick check to see if there were any PDC publications he had run out of. Then I took a bus a short distance down Digbeth to pop into Key Books.



*Chas Ball and Liz Cooper, probably taken in June or July 1977 at the first meeting of the co-operative, at Paul Westlake's home, 20 Richmond Avenue, London N.1.*

*Photographer unknown*

Key Books was owned and run by the Communist Party and once boasted it was the 'only bookseller in Birmingham that employed 100 per cent trade unionised labour'. That though was in 1946, the highpoint of communism in Britain. In early 1979, there was only one employee left, an elderly Scottish man with a dark suit, shiny leather shoes and horn-rimmed glasses whose name I think was Reg. Before ringing the bell, I made sure my jacket was buttoned up and my tie straight. The Communists were surprisingly conventional about dress and indeed many other things. It turned out I needn't have bothered. I was the first person Reg had seen all day and he was keen to talk politics even if he would have preferred an actual customer.

We had an enjoyable half-hour conversation particularly when I encouraged him to tell me stories of the Party's successes in Birmingham in the decade after the 2nd World War before I was born. Perhaps as a result, he ordered a few Spokesman books and a modest selection of Community Development Project and Hazards of Work pamphlets. He drew the line however at *Feminist Review*. 'The comrades round here, pal, have no time for any of that Women's Lib stuff!'. I left him to his memories.

It was late afternoon before I made my last stop of the day in the suburb of Moseley where I lived and which was known at the time as the Chelsea of the Midlands. At 150 Alcester Road was Prometheus, an alternative rather than a radical bookshop. It has been set up a few years before by John and Libby Dennis but was now run entirely by John while Libby had retrained as a social worker. She would soon change her name to Sarjuna and her outfits to orange as she embraced Bhagwan but John was far too sceptical to sign up to any guru perhaps because he was from Yorkshire. He did however have a large mystical section in the shop and always had a joss stick burning – or maybe it was a joint as in those days it was sometimes difficult to tell. I had lived in their house on Anderton Park Road a quarter of a mile from the shop for a year when I first moved to Birmingham after university in 1976, and John and I were still in a Men's Group together which had been set up the previous year on the suggestion of the women in our life who were all actively involved in Birmingham Women's Liberation.

It would have been tempting to spend the rest of the day indulging in Moseley gossip but we resisted and took a brisk hour going through the new PDC books on offer and some of the backlist. I tried to persuade him of the merits of *Radical Philosophy* and *Ideology and Consciousness* while he made me promise I would get hold of extra copies of Class Struggle, Furry Freak Brothers and anything from the Soil Association: John was organic long before it was fashionable. It was dark before I reached Redbeans, the wholefood shop in Kings Heath which I shared a flat above with a radical Dutch accountant called Frans and a young woman from Mauritius called Catherine who was studying English at Birmingham University. Neither was in. A good time to call the office and catch up.

## PDC

# A Bookseller Remembers

Lynn Alderson (Sisterwrite Women's Bookshop Co-operative).

PDC was really important. Without the distribution network there were many publications, newspapers, leaflets etc that we would not have been able to circulate. These were the days before social media and digital communication. The rise of alternative publishing, bookselling and distribution systems were about taking control of the whole process, not being at the mercy of straight publishers etc deciding what could and couldn't be produced and shared. It was about seizing political power, the ability to be self determining and creating a radical new culture.

The fact that PDC and radical bookshops existed meant that more publications were created too, so it was mutually sustaining. The network of radical publishers, distributors and booksellers were also something of a support network too, part of an underground, alternative society that was trying to make things work very differently. I remember once when one of our worker collectives had a disagreement between themselves, Sisterwrite and PDC came together to meet and help sort it out.

Collectives operated very differently from what were considered 'normal' working structures and relationships at the time. And, we were all learning new ways to work together. There were underlying commitments to feminism, to anti-racism, to human rights generally as well as to a more egalitarian working model. But also a sense that we could create workers' co-ops that would transform hierarchical organisations and be successful enterprises without being capitalist profiteers! It was a hopeful and exciting time. We did make it work (by and large) for quite a few years, and we road tested models that are still useful and used today. For those of us involved, our lives were changed forever by the experience and we learned, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the way things are is not the way things have to be.



# My time at The Independent Bookshop – Sheffield

Rosalind Eve

## From bookstall to city-centre shop

The Independent Bookshop grew from the bookstalls of two University of Sheffield student groups: Third World First and Community Action. Initially known as Ujamaa Books, the University gave the students use of a shop scheduled for demolition on Regent Street. As turnover and a Co-op bank loan grew, staff were employed, and the shop relocated to West Street.

In 1979 Dave Walton, the only paid worker at the time, registered the shop as a workers' co-op, changed its name to The Independent Bookshop and established the Collective, a small group of unpaid political activists, to support the work of the shop. He moved it to its third premises on Glossop Road, near the University and the Hallamshire Hospital, this time rented and leased from Sheffield City Council.

Three groups rented space. We shared our back office for a while with Halfway House, a community mental health project. The *Review of African Political Economy* (ROAPE), a refereed academic journal, had its office in the basement together with the Hazards Group, which eventually spawned Sheffield's Occupational Health Project (a marriage of GP, trade union and occupational health expertise that outgrew and outlived the Independent Bookshop). ROAPE too lives on, now published by the Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

The shop remained at its Glossop Road premises until 1986 when, after much and sometimes frustrating negotiation with the Council, the bookshop restored a long-empty and neglected Georgian end terrace. It was bang slap in the centre of Sheffield, facing the central library and Sheffield's theatres. The deal we struck, facilitated by the local Co-op Development Group, was that The Independent Bookshop committed to re-pay an enormous bank loan (to cover the cost of the building restoration); the loan

was underwritten by the Council on condition they had rent-free use of the top three storeys. There were five full-time workers at the time of opening in the city centre. As footfall rose, so the turnover increased exponentially.

## Stocking policies

At the Glossop Road premises our customers were primarily the left in Sheffield and students. In addition to stocking radical titles, we aimed to be a good general bookshop, meeting all our customers' literary wants and needs. We worked hard to fulfil individual customer orders, no matter how obscure.

Our largest and most comprehensive sections were fiction and, of course, politics: British, international, and sexual. We were proud to carry a wide range of titles and became stockists of many university course reading lists (with the support of university lecturers who would recommend us to their students).

The enthusiasms of each of the co-workers had a profound influence on stock development. We sold posters and cards such as Biff and Cath Tate which were both popular with our customers and carried a bigger profit margin, so subsidising the books. However, the growth of our children's book section, under the perspicacious eye of Trevor Thompson, eventually displaced the posters; as they had little political content, we were happy to see them go.

We stocked a wide range of left newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, often not without controversy. Groups delivering their weekly newspapers would each re-arrange the sales rack to make theirs more prominent.

Stocking *An Phoblacht*, published by Sinn Féin, led to threats to the bookshop. A Collective debate reached the unanimous conclusion to continue stocking it. Despite a large and vibrant feminist section, the SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) *Manifesto* didn't fare quite so well. I think we sold a few copies and then only reordered on request. When we first stocked *Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie the shop received threats from local Asian lads; this controversy was happily resolved with the help of community leaders. We continued to stock that too.

The presence of our tenants added serendipitous diversity to the shop. ROAPE for example contributed to a strong African Writer section (mostly the Heinemann African Writer Series). Similarly, the Hazards Group and Halfway House informed strong health and well-being self-help sections.

## Workers

Dave ran the shop, together with the help of Collective members, until April 1980 when I, as a 24-year-old eager to leave work as a nurse, joined him as the second full-time co-worker.

One of the first things I remember doing was buying a vacuum cleaner (!), swiftly followed by introducing, developing, and refining the Booksellers Association stock control system which, apart from its obvious benefits, became an essential tool for all Independent Bookshop workers as they learned the book trade. A year later Dave left to take up permanent residence and a new career in France.

With my single year of on-the-job learning, I took the reins, with continuing and crucial Collective support. An advert for a second co-worker, followed by formal interviews, led to a couple of attempts to appoint Dave's successor. We were all on a rapid learning trajectory: good human resource practice and premise management as well as the book trade. After some months and with much relief on my part, Trevor Thompson was appointed.

The two of us shared all the tasks: stock-checks, buying, cleaning, customer sales, promotions, etc. Meanwhile, the accounts were meticulously kept by Collective member Gordon Henshaw, one of the original Ujamaa students and an accountant by training. He lived rent-free, in return for his labours, in one of the rooms above the shop. (He put in many hours after a day's paid work as a community worker). Three more Collective members rented rooms above the shop, generating a modest additional income.

Trevor and I were joined first by Jenny as the third full-time co-worker then Celia, Sally and Rhonnie joined us later in anticipation of our move to the city centre.

Throughout our time at Glossop Road our window displays were done by Lynne Barraclough. She was given a free rein to do as she pleased, within a given theme, and the results were spectacular installations, long before I'd even heard of installation artwork.

As the workforce expanded, first to four and then to six, we continued to share all the tasks of running the shop, seeing reps, taking deliveries, the customer sales desk, stock-taking, customer orders, cleaning, dusting, and Hoovering. New workers learned buying from the more experienced staff.

Each publisher sales rep was linked to one staff member. This relationship between rep and worker mattered. Reps helped us negotiate better discounts, sale or return terms, and promotion offers. They also helped us better understand the wider bookselling world. For the reps of left wing and feminist publishers, we were a refuge from the conservative buying policies of other bookshops.

In the early days Trevor and I, the two workers, met monthly with the Collective but as additional workers were taken on, the co-workers met weekly and the wider Collective met quarterly.

## Bookstalls, book launches, book fairs and library supply

We routinely supplied bookstalls on a sale or return basis to many local groups. For national conferences held in Sheffield, such as Critical Social Policy, History Workshop Journal (our biggest conference bookstall) and Radical Midwives, we would carefully research and order books to meet their specific needs. Unpaid Collective members would run the conference bookstalls.

On a grander scale, and in collaboration with the book distributor Third World Publications, we ran a Black and Third World Bookfair. Jenny took the lead. Weekend-long, it was in turn challenging, exhausting, exciting, and ultimately a success, attracting hundreds of customers, many from far away (including three particularly memorable women from the Bronx, New York).

Following the move to the city centre, offers to run book launches and readings came thick and fast with authors ranging from Bea Campbell, writer and activist, to John Agard, Afro-Guyanese playwright, poet, and children's writer. Each one fascinating. Listening to writers talk about their work and witnessing the impact their thinking had on their audiences was powerful stuff.

We organised the launch of Janina Bauman's *Winter in the Morning* (1986), and then *A Dream of Belonging* (1988), both Virago. In these autobiographical accounts she describes her life and escape from first the Warsaw Ghetto and then antisemitic purges in post war Poland. These launches attracted a great deal of attention, not least from the local Polish community. Someone carved 'remember Katyn' with a hangman's noose on our front door. Presumably, the author of this reminder assumed we, as a left-wing



bookshop, supported the role of the Soviet Union when they massacred 22,000 members of the Polish army and buried them in the forest of Katyn. They must surely have been unaware of the terrible truth, that Janina's father had himself been one of those massacred.

At the launch of *Winter in the Morning* a member of the audience stood up at the end and declared himself to have been a member of the Warsaw resistance who had supplied food to Janina and her family, when they were in hiding, after escaping the Ghetto. A powerful moment that made me cry then and still does every time I recall it.

Following *Winter in the Morning* we launched Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Chatto and Windus, 1987. This was another day I will never forget, sitting in our basement office whilst Toni Morrison, my heroine, signed copies of her book in readiness for the evening event at Sheffield City Hall. Then in 1989, in collaboration with Sheffield City Libraries and as part of the annual Off the Shelf Bookfair, we launched Alice Walker's *Temple of My Familiar*.

## Finances

The finances of the shop were always cut fine, just about breaking even each year despite a steady increase in turnover. Co-workers were all paid the same rate; less than that of a, classically, poorly paid student nurse.

I remember celebrating the turnover when it reached £100,000 at the Glossop Road premises. It subsequently rose to over £250,000 once we moved to the city centre.

Gordon paid the invoices and played the role of Finance Manager whilst negotiation with publishers and distributors was the preserve of the co-workers. In the early years, our accounts with suppliers were often closed during the summer holidays, Gordon paying them off just in time to re-stock for the new academic year.

The main investment the shop had was from a Co-op Bank loan which we aimed to increase each year. Over time, the loan enabled us to carry more stock, do up the Glossop Road shop (replacing home-made, bending shelves with beautiful bespoke units, and an open drawer under a table with a proper electric till).

For several years, the loan was secured on my house and that of another member of the Collective, Jan Burgess. This put us in a somewhat

precarious position, but it illustrates our total commitment to keeping the show on the road. When we moved to the city-centre, and much to my and Jan's relief, the loan was underwritten by Sheffield City Council.

Every year on January 1st workers and Collective members would gather to do the annual stock-take (despite hangovers), accompanied by much fried breakfast and fresh orange juice. It was an onerous task, made easy and sometimes good fun by the camaraderie. Many of the Collective were long-standing members and we became close friends.

In 1985, and with the help of Alan Beevers, one of those responsible for developing Sheffield's library services, we began supplying Sheffield Libraries. The terms of supply were that we would sell them at a 10% discount, ready processed. Processing involved sticking date labels into the books, covering them with plastic and typing three library tickets for each copy. From their point of view, we gave them access to titles unavailable from other bookshops. From ours, it grew our business, got radical titles into the mainstream, and increased our workload!

The ebb and flow of the student calendar mattered a great deal less once we began supplying Sheffield City libraries.

## Security and political sensitivities

The shop was always a potential target for the far right. Shortly before we moved from Glossop Road to the City Centre the shop was attacked, its windows smashed, and tar daubed over the stock. As the named key-holder, I was called out by the police at 3am and left alone in the shop, for what felt like an eternity, waiting for the boarding-up contractors to arrive.

When we launched Janina Baumann's *Dream of Belonging*, we received threats from far-right groups. Thanks to an intervention by the father of one of our customers, the police were persuaded to provide the event with their protection, alongside a few local anarchists.

## Me

I left at the end of 1989 having worked in the shop for the best part of 10 years. I had given it my all, and worked many, many hours of unpaid overtime. My parents had been in the CP (leaving in 1956 at the time of the Khrushchev revelations). Mum had worked in a CP bookshop in Birmingham. So, my time at the bookshop felt like a continuation of a political debate that was close to the heart of my family. Leaving was hard.

The shop had given me many wonderful opportunities to learn new skills, not least that of problem solving and small organisation development, develop my self-confidence and meet some of the most wonderful and inspiring people of the time. Having an overview of new book publications made me privilege to new thinking, new trends. But the world of primary health care development beckoned. All my acquired skills proved invaluable in my future working life. I still enjoy close, solid friendships made at the shop.

## Demise

The Independent Bookshop continued trading in the city centre until 1998. In the end, the demise of the net book agreement compounded by nearby competition from a highly successful and appealing Waterstones meant it was no longer viable. It was sorely missed by many when it finally closed its doors to the last customer.

## P.S.

Now, that same city centre shop is home to a Starbucks, an international chain that couldn't be further from the ethos and values of the Independent Bookshop.

# Richard Carlile 1790-1843

Dave Cope

*Continuing the series on the first radical booksellers, Dave Cope explores the life and work of Richard Carlile, 1790-1843.*

Carlile was not only one of the most famous, to some infamous, booksellers of his time, he was a great editor and publisher of radical papers and books and pamphlets. He suffered more than any other bookseller at the hands of the state. He played an important role in the struggle against the tax on knowledge, and he was a leading secularist and republican, as well as a pioneer in supporting women's rights. As an individual he could be difficult and uncompromising and had many political fallings out with fellow reformers.

Born in Ashburton, Devon, he left school at 12. In 1811 he left Exeter to find work as a tinsmith in London. The 'General Distress' of 1816 politicised Carlile and he started reading all he could. Converted to Radicalism by Tom Paine's writings, he became a reformer in 1817, aged 27.

On 19 March, 1817 he borrowed a pound from his employer and bought 100 copies of the *Black Dwarf*, a new Radical paper edited by Thomas Wooler, and sold it, and other papers, all over London. He was helped in establishing himself in business by William Sherwin from whose premises he could base himself as a printer and publisher of radical pamphlets. He eventually took over Sherwin's *Weekly Political Register* and changed the title to the *Republican*.

The front of his reprints has the gloriously provocative text: 'Printed and published by R Carlile, at the Republican Office, 183 Fleet Street; and sold by all those who are not afraid of incurring the displeasure of his Majesty's Ministers, their Spies or Informers, or public plunderers of any denomination'.

Carlile printed at low price and in large quantities, and he played a major role in Paine's revival.

By summer 1819, Carlile's shop was the largest centre for radical and freethought books, pamphlets and newspapers. 'I knew the face of almost every public man in London, by their coming to my shop for pamphlets'.

Carlile, who was beginning to get a national reputation as a Radical, was present at the Peterloo Massacre on 16 August 1819, having been invited to speak. He wrote the first full account of the events under the headline 'Horrid Massacre at Manchester'. It was printed with a longer Letter to the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, 'On the conduct of the Magisterial and Yeomanry Assassins of Manchester on 16 August 1819'.

He actively sought to confront the authorities on principle and was not afraid of prison, and he faced a barrage of separate indictments in 1819, some from the Government, some from the two private organisations - The Society for the Suppression of Vice, Blasphemy and Profaneness and the Constitutional Association for Opposing the Progress of Disloyal and Seditious Principles. Carlile was charged with blasphemy and seditious libel for selling Paine's *Age of Reason* and the American Deist Elihu Palmer's *Principles of Nature*.

In November 1819 he was sentenced to 3 years in Dorchester prison and fined £1,500, plus compelled to provide securities of £1,200. This was extended to six years when he refused to pay the fine. Books to the value of £600 and cash were immediately taken from his shop.

Over his lifetime he was to spend nine years and seven months in prison, out of sentences of twelve years. His health was seriously affected by this, yet some of his most effective work was actually done from prison. He could reflect and write, he studied theology, he maintained contacts with his supporters and edited his papers. Carlile called his prison 'Dorchester University'.

While he was in prison, his wife Jane continued the bookselling and publishing business. He had volunteer helpers, called his 'shopmen' – though they weren't all male.

Jane was sentenced to two years in 1821, followed by Carlile's sister Mary, sentenced to six months. In February 1822 the shop at 55 Fleet Street closed permanently when the court issued writs for unpaid fines and proceeded to a second much larger seizure of stock.

Carlile even wrote *Defensive Instructions for the People* - a manual for street fighting - while he was still in prison. After Peterloo, he did believe violence against a violent state was justified.

On his release, he undertook a series of tours – 'infidel tours' – between 1825 and 1829, and another in 1833. He would hold meetings, challenge clergymen to debates and visit his contacts.

He was imprisoned again in 1831, after supporting agricultural workers campaigning against wage cuts whom he advised to act as if they were at war with the government.



Eliza Sharples, a disciple, visited him in prison in January 1832. She was one of first women to speak publicly as a freethinker. She also started living openly with Carlile who had by this time separated from his wife Jane.

After his release in August 1833, he announced that he had 'found the true Christianity' i.e. that the Bible and Christ's example were revolutionary, despite being distorted by 'priestcraft'. He even talked of 'christian atheism'. This was a huge move away from his earlier deism let alone his advocacy of atheism, and undoubtedly lost him support. Many working-class supporters were also turning to Robert Owen's secularism and socialism.

Carlile had little influence after this. Carlile and Sharples lived in poverty in Enfield before Carlile returned to Fleet Street where he died a year later in 1843 aged only 52.

Turning to some of his political beliefs, at his trial Carlile defined himself as a deist but by 1821 he called himself an atheist. His *Republican* became the leading 'infidel' paper of the time.

In 1822 Carlile proposed that Paine's January birthday should be celebrated instead of that of Christ.

On one occasion, after his stock had been seized, he responded by putting effigies of a bailiff, and a bishop arm in arm with a devil, in his shop windows. When crowds gathered outside, he was imprisoned for causing a nuisance.

In the 1820s Carlile stood alone among the leading reformers in insisting on the need to remove a corrupt monarchy and a corrupt House of Lords. His competitors Cartwright, Hunt and Cobbett only later turned against hereditary monarchy.

Carlile was always against the use of petitions, popular at the time and later with the Chartists, which he thought had no effect: they were like 'begging a thief to hang himself'.

He held extreme views on gypsies, partly coloured by his hatred of gambling, to the extent that he called for their extermination. 'They are a class of thieves who deserve no sympathy: they are wild beasts, not social beings'. (*Republican* 8 Dec 1826).

Integral to his belief in education was self-reform in terms of healthy living and care of the body.

But he did take quicksilver daily believing it beneficial to his health.

His views on the participation of women in society and in organisations were the most advanced of all contemporary radicals. He printed letters, articles and speeches sent by women to his papers.

He criticised the Bible for its archaic views on women, and blamed Christianity for women's oppression. In his 1826 *Every Woman's Book* he called for equal voting rights, job opportunities, and the right to contraception. Perhaps the most striking aspect of his feminism was his willingness to write openly about women's sexuality. The book contained the very un-nineteenth century injunction: 'Young women! Assume an equality, plead your passions when you feel them'; he went on to advocate the use of contraceptives which left the woman in control – the sponge over the condom. Carlile argued that sexual intercourse was a source of physical and mental well-being, fully justified outside marriage. He developed his views further in an article in the *Prompter* in 1831. Here he demanded women's right to vote, and to become both MPs and public officials.

Carlile's papers - there were a dozen, some very short-lived - were integral to his activism. The close relationship between readers and editor is found with Cobbett, but is perhaps at its strongest in the case of Carlile.

Carlile published the *Gorgon*, which has been described as the first paper for trade unionists.

As editor and publisher, the most important of Carlile's papers were the *Republican* and the *Lion*. The *Republican* even out-sold the *Times*. In September 1819, the Mayor of Exeter ordered all copies of the *Republican* to be publicly burnt outside the Guildhall.

The paper became very popular but it was hit by a new tax on the press which forced an increase in price from 2d to 6d. from January 1820.

As for his followers, support for Carlile developed during his first three years of imprisonment. By the end of 1822 Bush estimates his supporters numbered 'several thousand men, women and children'. Carlile wielded considerable influence through what was a sort of corresponding society.

Zetetic Clubs (from the Greek 'seeker') were set up to support Carlile, intellectually and practically - £1,400 (over £90,000 today) was sent to him between 1819 and 1826.

There were 65 working-class groups in London alone, two were women's groups, who sent donations between 1819 and 1822. They collected a

penny a week. Many, perhaps the majority, disappeared after one donation. Richer groups collected one shilling a week.

People sent more than money: one woman from the Isle of Wight, sent £1 5s and five bottles of wine and a cake for Carlile's 'imprisoned shopmen to celebrate Paine's birthday'.

Julian Hibbert was a rich and regular donor to Carlile. From 1820 he had given Carlile over £7,500. He had paid his prison debt of £500, supported him and his family while in prison, financed various premises and papers.

Other activities supporters engaged in were selling his pamphlets and especially newspapers; writing articles and corresponding with Carlile, organising dinners on the occasion of Paine and Carlile's birthdays, though Carlile somewhat frowned on this. And reading groups were very important for working class supporters.

Carlile called his bookshops 'Temples of Reason', in imitation of Daniel Isaac Eaton. He had eight different premises for his bookshops and offices, sometimes with a printing press. All were in Fleet Street or adjoining it. One was demolished by the owner after two suspicious fires ('one of suspiciously Christian provenance' in Wiener's words).

When oppression was strongest, his sellers were hidden behind a screen which had clock hands pointing to lists of publications on a dial on which buyers would indicate what they wanted and a shopman would pass the books through. Some had devices such as holes in the floor and ceiling and pulleys - all in the hope of avoiding identification, but every helper was arrested. Most charges were for blasphemy, some for seditious libel. Only one shopman was acquitted - when a witness did not turn up. These helpers, who were overwhelmingly working-class and young, also liaised with printers and organised distribution of papers and pamphlets.

Two wives took the place of their imprisoned husbands in Carlile's shop - Mrs Jeffries and Mrs Perry.

One of those imprisoned was Susannah Wright, wife of a Leeds bookseller.

She also appeared as a witness in another trial. She was eight months pregnant and subjected to extremely harsh repeated questioning by the prosecution, trying to catch her out for perjury. The following gives a flavour of the strength of character of these volunteers. She swears on the

Bible to tell the truth but is questioned later whether she believes in the Scriptures:

**Witness:** 'I shall not answer that question'.

**Prosecutor:** 'Do you believe the Bible to be the word of God?'

**Witness:** 'I shall have my own opinion on that subject'

**Prosecutor:** 'Have you not the misfortune to have many indictments against you?'

**Witness:** 'I have two indictments against me, but if you consider it a misfortune, I do not'

**Prosecutor:** 'You say you do not believe in the Holy Scriptures?'

**Witness:** 'I have said no such thing. I may answer that question when put upon my trial'

**Prosecutor:** 'Was not the Shop window placarded all over?'

**Witness:** 'Yes, the same as all other shops that have anything to sell'

**Prosecutor:** 'I hope not. I never saw any so.'

**Witness:** 'If you had used your eyes you would have seen plenty of them placarded'

**Prosecutor:** 'Pray, Madam, was not there a placard with "This is the Mart for Sedition and Blasphemy" upon it, in the window?'

**Witness:** '...it had the expression you use, within inverted commas, to represent that it was borrowed from somewhere, and in not copying it so the Newspapers misrepresented it'.

Carlile claimed that all helpers in his shop were volunteers who only received food and lodging, though he did pay his imprisoned shopmen up to 5s a week, to help them out.

It was this cohort of shopmen, in Newgate Jail, that created the *Newgate Monthly*, a radical prison newspaper which lasted for two years. One Dorset farm labourer, Richard Hassell, wrote articles on mathematics and chemistry for it. Williams Holmes wrote atheistic verse. After his release, he continued in the radical book trade in Sheffield, selling pamphlets and writing for the *Sheffield Independent* and other provincial papers. Humphrey Boyle and Thomas Ryley Perry, the 'itinerant comedian', continued selling papers and pamphlets in Leeds and Leicester respectively.

The shopmen and women came from all over the country, and they weren't the only ones charged with selling Carlile's publications. Over 150 men

and women were to go to prison for acting as Carlile's agents. Most street vendors were poor, relying on sales for a livelihood. Joseph Swann, a Stockport hatter, spent four and half years in gaol for selling Carlile's *Republican*.

These trials took place all over the country.

After his 1829 tour, Carlile wanted a large meeting hall. Hibbert acquired the building, formerly used for equestrian performances, and in May 1830 the famous Rotunda was opened on Blackfriars Road as a 'Freethought Coliseum'.

There were two lecture rooms, and the main hall which could accommodate about 1,500. There was a room for refreshments and a library. It was a financial risk, but there was a demand for a large venue for Radical meetings. With improved finances due the success of the Rotunda, in November 1830, the first issue of Carlile's new paper, the *Prompter*, was launched. It referred to the Rotunda as 'the real House of Commons'.

Every Sunday evening Carlile's political partner 'the Reverend' Robert Taylor preached provocative sermons, on one occasion dressing up as the devil's chaplain. These 'sermons' were dramatic and extravagant; Taylor mixed sun worship, astrology, paganism, ancient religions – all with the intention of denigrating Christianity. These could draw attendances of sometimes over 1,000. Wiener calls these 'infidel dramas' 'among the most interesting examples of radical theater in the early nineteenth century'. One play, 'Captain Swing', provided a sympathetic view of the rural rioters.

Carlile has no statue, no plaque on his London premises and even his grave in Kensal Green is unmarked.



## Further reading

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# Trouble at Mushroom

Ross Bradshaw

I should say at the start of this article that most of my seventeen years at Nottingham's Mushroom Bookshop\* were spent unpacking parcels, serving customers, seeing trade reps, servicing library orders, doing accounts, packing parcels... and all the minutiae of running what became a medium sized business with several staff. The shop was turning over £400,000 by the time I left in 1995.

But from time to time things got a little more dramatic. This article outlines some of those more dramatic moments, many of which were faced by other radical bookshops of that era. The most dramatic was being attacked by around fifty fascists on a busy Saturday...

On that day, in January 1994, we knew there were fascists in the area who were coming to a concert by the Nazi band, Skrewdriver. We knew that the concert was called off but the audience was still around. The police knew there were fascists around in number but did not seem to know the concert had been called off. The police had been following the fascists' movements but not closely enough to realise there might be another attraction. I am not even remotely suggesting collusion. It was a cock-up, and the police could not have been more supportive to us after the incident and over the next year. But fifty fascists attacked.

We had been expecting some kind of incursion sometime - though nothing like this - and our plan was that whoever was at the front of the shop would hold the door as best they could while other staff evacuated customers by the two back doors. I was the lucky person to try to hold the door - against fifty skinheads. Our attackers, however, were not very good at it. I was beaten, but not badly. Our plate glass windows were smashed but from things being thrown out rather than in, so less glass, and the fascists made a good job of smashing up our monitors rather than going for the modems. Bookshelves tumbled. One other member of staff was cut by flying glass and a customer on crutches, who could not run, was knocked over but the rest of the customers got out. She had just arrived in Nottingham where she had moved, from Hackney, in search of a quieter life. Then it was all over, quickly. The next customer to arrive happened to be a nurse who took immediate charge. I was taken to hospital for a quick check up, then got a ride in a police car to try to spot the gang around town. 32 were arrested, many of whom had hopped on a service bus to Heanor, a local fascist stronghold which led to the amusing thought of a large bunch of skinheads asking "25 singles to Heanor and make it quick, the police are on our tail." Just over a year later twelve were sent to jail, all given the same

sentence save for one man, all the way from Scotland, whose fingerprints were on the underside of shelves who could not then claim “I was there but I didn’t do anything” which the rest of them said. He got three years.

The matter had international publicity because a freelance photographer was nearby whose pictures went worldwide and at the top of the pile of children’s books thrown to the floor was *The Diary of Anne Frank*. The Socialist Workers Party/Anti-Nazi League called their own press conference and announced a demonstration... which we ignored as we were organising what turned out to be the largest anti-fascist demonstration since the 1930s with the full support of our City Council, Nottingham Trades Council, local MPs and the MEP. Most of the organising was done by Nottinghamshire Anti-Fascist Alliance (NAFA). You can work out the politics here.

The next year was pretty grim. Fascist groups would occasionally appear at the end of the street, but were invariably moved on by the police. During the year the fascist-friendly pubs around Heanor were named in the House of Commons, while locally there were regular confrontations with the far right. Breweries began to change their attitude towards hosting far-right meetings and gigs. Fascism lost ground. Their high point was the attack on the bookshop, but it was a turning point. Eventually there was the trial. During it the fascists’ minibus was trashed and their leader, who’d avoided being charged for the event he took part in, was trashed too.

But this followed years of low level harassment. Locks glued up; an attempt at arson (our gate had a letterbox, foolishly, but when it burned it fell outwards not in); spray painting; attempts to smash through our security grilles; Nazi stickers found in books and, bizarrely, hundreds of phone calls where the caller would shout “RED SCUM, GET OUT OF NOTTINGHAM OR DIE!” before playing German martial music. Occasional boneheads would visit and act tough. It was never easy, turning up for work not knowing what you would find and there were days when some workers were reluctant to pick up the phone as every third call or so would be a death threat (and in those pre-email days our phone rang all the time).

Shortly after the court appearance I resigned from the bookshop. I was to have been the main witness until they pleaded guilty to reduced charges, I was the secretary of NAFA and, contemporaneously, was involved in a difficult defence campaign for a black man arrested following a racist attack on him. This led me to appear before the same judge as the fascist case for contempt of court! I was exhausted. Following the attack on the

bookshop, by the way, Mushroom's takings went up 25% giving it a sound financial position. It's maybe not the best way to put on turnover though.

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A more complicated issue was over Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. At the time there were several bookshops in Nottingham, including a Penguin bookshop which was the subject of a viable arson attempt (Penguin being the first UK publisher of Rushdie's book before it was taken over by the secret 'Consortium' to take the heat off) but Mushroom was the only place to sell the book. We filled our windows with it adding a poster produced by Bookmarks saying "Fight Racism, Not Rushdie". This too led to a big increase in turnover as, it seemed, everyone wanted the book. Some were dodgy customers who saw buying the book as a blow against Islam, some were people who just wanted to read the book and many were Muslims. At the time we always asked if people wanted a bag. Many of the Muslims said the equivalent of "OMG Yes!", but an equal number proudly refused and marched out carrying the book prominently. We got another batch of death threats to add to the file. There was an anti-Rushdie demonstration. It was called by a community leader who was active in the Labour Party. He told me he would ensure that the march went nowhere near the bookshop and would be carefully stewarded as he did not want 'the youth' to get into trouble but it was better to have a controlled demonstration. Of course, he said, he would prefer if we didn't sell the book but hoped he would see me soon. Respect. I did speak at a Labour Party meeting called to discuss the issue, which had a majority Muslim attendance, but found no personal hostility to my defence of the book, though a dreadlocked black representative of - was it PEN? Index on Censorship? - was subject to some racist abuse.

Another book that led to big sales was *Spycatcher*. Now seen as uncontroversial, in 1987 the Government of the day went to some effort to stop this autobiography of an MI5 agent, Peter Wright, from being read in this country. It was pre-internet, but still a hopeless task. You could buy the book in America or in mainland Europe but not in the UK. People were smuggling in copies. One particular Mushroom worker - the late Keith Leonard - was somewhat obsessed with the secret state and keen we brought the book in. We ordered it from every conceivable overseas distributor thinking that some copies at least would arrive. They all did, more or less at the same time. Rather than discreetly selling them under the counter we thought, well, we could get caught anyway so we might

as well go down fighting. We filled our double windows with them. The first person to pass was a beat policeman. He walked past, walked back, stared... He came in and said did we know that the book in our window was illegal? Yes, we said, did he want to buy a copy? No, thank you, he said, he was just going off duty... and good luck. We sold them all, with no interest from the state as shortly you could buy copies in street markets and the government gave up.

A battle we did not fight was another MI5 book, *One Girl's War*, published in Ireland in 1986. We got a letter - buried in my files somewhere - saying it had been noted that we had this on our shelves and we should take it off sale or face prosecution. We had one copy, had never sold it. It was nice to know that someone browsed our obscure shelves though. In this case we blew the dust off the book and just took it off sale. Where was social media when you needed it?

More difficult was when customers wanted us to stock or not stock particular books. This happened from time to time, usually leading to those complaining flouncing off saying they would never come back (and thereafter buy their books from commercial competitors without bothering too much about what other books they sold). But it was an issue of lesbian S & M books, where we respected the views of both sides of the argument, that felt impossible to resolve. It was just difficult to be in the middle of a dispute not of our making. One group of lesbians complained that we were selling lesbian S & M books, another group wanted us to continue. This reflected debates outside the bookshop, but what to do with the competing complaints? The lesbian working at the bookshop at the same time rightly said it was an issue for all of us to work out, not to leave to her. In the end this fizzled out as the key book was *Coming to Power* by the then lesbian writer Pat (now Patrick) Califia. We said that we would take it off sale because it include a rape fantasy story, and we did not wish to stock rape fantasy material and for us that was the issue not consensual sexual activity. The decision seemed to satisfy both sides.

We had other issues with customers - anarchists who thought that it was fine to steal books from us, particularly anarchist books. Our section was stripped steadily. We eventually found the main culprit and banned him. By then he had succeeded in ensuring that there was one bookshop in Nottingham that no longer stocked anarchist books. Well done, that man. We reverted to stocking the books later. This was not the only incident of shop-lifting. We eventually installed security equipment and caught a number of people, some of whom claimed to be on the left.



There were times within the collective that things were all not quite sweetness and light. It would be surprising if there were not occasional problems over 28 years of the shop's life but this article is concentrating on issues related to the outside world rather than internal issues.

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Mushroom Bookshop had pacifist roots, which led to some long discussions over whether to stock Sinn Féin's weekly newspaper *An Phoblacht*. Uneasy with stocking or not stocking, we compromised by saying it could be reserved. At its height we were getting 35-40 copies for our Irish customers. With the Government trying to censor Republican views and with the local Irish community subject to racist abuse and attack we felt it important to offer the newspaper. One man, a lorry driver, always took a bundle and refused a discount - indeed he always gave us a big tip at Christmas for selling the paper. It was probably the only tip we ever had.

We had some problems with 'gay books' - the term LGBT was not used then. Importing gay books was problematic as books invoiced by our two American suppliers would just go missing, would just not turn up. We had no idea who was taking them but learned what sort of gay books would get through and what wouldn't. We never found out how or why the books went missing, though our experience here was nothing compared to what happened to some other radical bookshops, especially Gay's the Word. Their story is here: [talkinghumanities.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2021/02/16/bigoted-british-tiger-that-bit-off-more-than-it-could-chew/](https://talkinghumanities.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2021/02/16/bigoted-british-tiger-that-bit-off-more-than-it-could-chew/)

Back to the state's less covert actions... This time the issue was the Obscene Publications Act. Around the country there had been police raids on publishers and bookshops, over drug-related books not obscenity as such, though the law covers drugs too. Those raided included Grass Roots in Manchester, Knockabout Comics, Mushroom Bookshop and others. In our case the police raided on a busy Saturday afternoon and took away our entire drugs section plus one book on female masturbation that had just arrived. The books included Tom Wolfe's *Electric Koolhaïd Acid Test*, De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, William Burroughs' *Junky* and other literary volumes which were taken at the same time as *A Guide to Growing Marijuana in the British Isles* and others of a less literary bent. We had never received any complaints about our stock and later discovered that the local drugs squad bought books from that section for their works' library. This was not a local issue, but - what a surprise! - when the raid took place our local daily paper happened to have a journalist and

photographer outside leading to a press report about a local bookshop raided for obscenity, complete with a picture. We came out fighting with a leaflet for our customers. We challenged the decision. The way the law worked was that the books were guilty unless proven innocent so we had to take a case against the police to win the books back. The court case was serious and at times bizarre, with the CPS (I think it was) asking me, in the witness box, if we had limits on books we would stock such as books on paedophilia. "What is paedophilia?" I replied (it was a long time ago), but the judge moved on. In the end we won most of the books back. The police were allowed to burn the aforementioned growing guide, a book on cooking with cannabis and the joke book *A Child's Garden of Grass* - in case a careless child happened on it while looking for *A Child's Garden of Verse*. Even the police side struggled to keep their faces straight over that one. We won virtually all the rest on literary grounds and were awarded costs against the police.

The innocent books were returned, in perfect condition save for the book on female masturbation which was, shall we say, not in the condition in which it left the shop. Though we knew that the local police views on this raid were not unanimous we did get a subsequent 'informal' visit telling us off the record that, OK, we won that one but unless we wanted uniformed police coming to the shop on busy Saturdays just to look around we might want to drop having a drugs section. This might count as a score draw.

Paedophilia – though we barely knew the word – did come up though when approached by the Paedophile Information Exchange to stock their magazine, *Magpie*. The covering letter said that we were a radical bookshop and theirs was a radical magazine... We passed it round the team in amazement before binning it.

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The period I worked at Mushroom started in the wake of the days of great political trials, ranging from the Gay News prosecution through to the 'Colonel B' affair and the Aubrey-Berry-Campbell (ABC) trial. Previously I'd had a walk-on part in the BWINIC 14 case (a trial of people for Incitement to Disaffection over giving leaflets to soldiers due to serve in Ireland), being one of those arrested in Scotland in what would have been a second wave of trials had the 14 not won. Mushroom had always stocked material on these trials, including the famous 'Who is Colonel B?' badges. The National Front and the more overtly Nazi British Movement were on the go and there were major industrial disputes, as well as the

rise of CND and nonviolent direct action. Several Mushroom workers, Chris Cook, Kate Marsden, Hilary Trengrouse and I were arrested for NVDA with Chris being jailed. The bookshop was an organising base for opposition to the Falklands War and the Iraq war so there was a certain expectation that bookshops themselves would be a focus of conflict. Our little yellow delivery van, adorned with interlinked feminist, anarchist and CND signs, was used as a support vehicle for protests here and there, including at Molesworth Peace Camp, and, on one occasion, was used as a getaway vehicle for some liberated chickens (it was so long ago it can now be revealed). Yet for most of the week it was used to deliver law books to both local university libraries and school books to school libraries. Our customers seemed to be quite happy to shop somewhere with a reputation. It never occurred to us there was any conflict between being a successful professional business and all that other stuff. In fact it was probably all that other stuff that helped build the bookshop.

I am, however, pleased to say that - so far - Five Leaves simply gets on with the business of selling books and organising events. My own last skirmish with the law was prior to the bookshop, when I accidentally broke through police lines and was fortunately arrested while running towards a very large group of fascists in 1999. The bookshop is political of course, and we do our bit, but we live in different times.

*\* Mushroom Bookshop was a worker-controlled business, set up in 1972. I worked there from 1979 to 1995. The shop closed in 2000 after financial difficulties.*

*\*\* Ross Bradshaw set up Five Leaves Publications after leaving Mushroom Bookshop, which eventually morphed into Five Leaves Bookshop in November 2013, still publishing but now primarily an independent - and radical - bookshop.*

*[www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk](http://www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk)*

# The Radical Bookstore: counterspace for social movements

By Kimberley Kinder

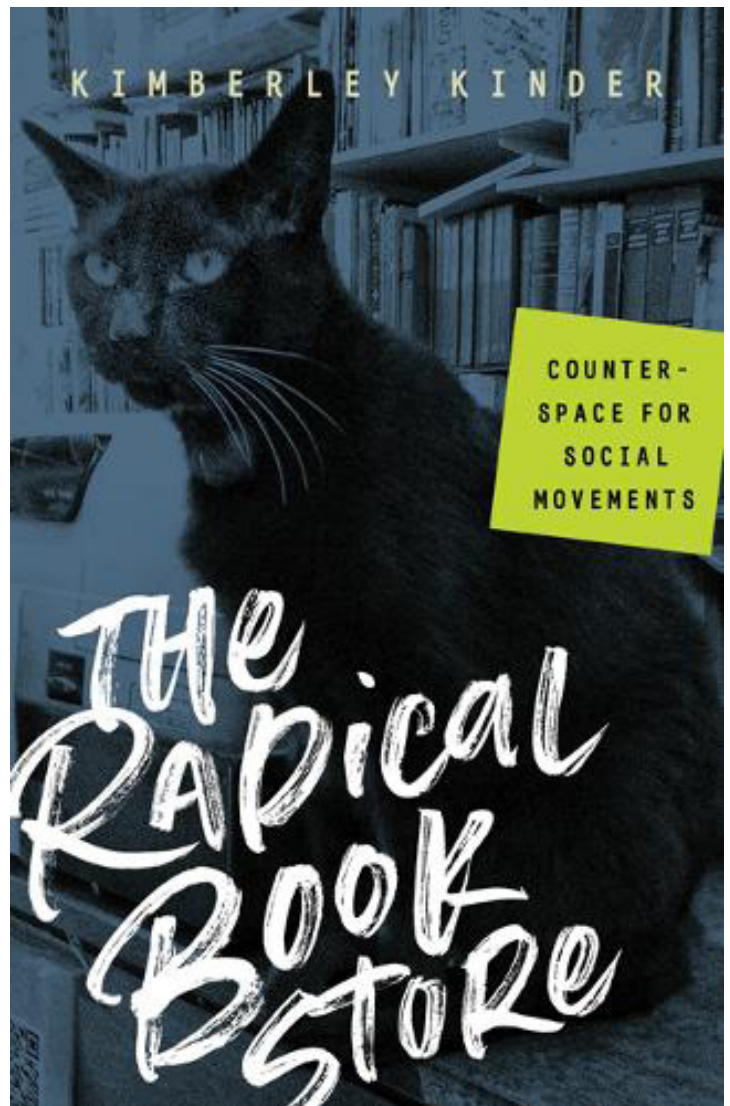
(University of Minnesota Press, £20.99)

Ross Bradshaw

There are no current books on radical bookshops in the UK, and save for one academic book on feminist bookstores\* in North America, this is the first book I have seen on this subject there generally. This is surprising given the radical booktrade's contribution to left-wing culture. On my shelves I have a book devoted to the Berkeley bookstore Cody's, a book on Melbourne's radical bookshops and several old British texts but we really should publish more about ourselves!

Unfortunately *The Radical Bookstore* is too academic to reach beyond a specialist audience. That is not to say it is without value. The book, for example, discusses "landscapes that shout" compared to "landscapes that entice", contrasting the book displays and interior decor of different shops which have different approaches. This alone should be a subject of discussion on the shop floor (even if nobody is suggesting joining our Prime Minister and employing Lulu Lytle at £800 for a roll of wallpaper). What are we trying to say, and to whom? Who do we exclude if people find our spaces "intimidating to walk into"? Do potential customers think we are shouting at them? Ironically, though that might not be the right word, most of the books available in the radicals could appear in any big mainstream bookstore but, as Minneapolis's Boneshaker Books suggest, it's "like somebody has taken a big bookstore and put it through a sieve and only the very best stuff came out... So hopefully there's not as much noise, and you just get all the signal that you've been looking for."

Some traditions in radical bookselling in the States have been uncommon here until



recently, businesses owned by what Kinder calls “activist entrepreneurs”. A neat phrase that accurately describes many of the recent radical bookshops here, compared to the collective tradition once more common. And what might these activist entrepreneurs have to do to survive? They might have to compromise. Or, sometimes, close down rather than compromise when only a more commercial approach will pay the workers or the rent. This happened over some shops going “non-profit”, the equivalent of obtaining charitable status here, which brings tax and other concessions but limits the campaign possibilities of the spaces. They felt it was better to shut up shop than “sell out”.

The rent... one of the reasons radicals have struggled has been gentrification, though, astonishingly Kinder writes about neighbourhoods where they have been part of that gentrification, where radical bookstores have anchored or even started to turn round a failing retail area. She remarks that not all the shops eschew capitalism – “In many feminist-, queer-, and Black orientated spaces, the goal is less about escaping capitalism and more about combating patriarchy, homophobia and white privilege by getting more minorities into leadership positions, including business ownership.”

Finance is often a problem, leading to volunteerism and “self-sacrifice”. About half the shops she spoke to relied on volunteer labour or private money. This is a major political issue, for who can afford to work for free or extremely low pay indefinitely? Red Emma’s, an anarchist set-up, moved from people working for free, usually with a job on the side, to full-time employment with living wages and benefits which, in their words “keeps the space going.” Others, however, don’t mind being shoved to the margins because they “associate the spatial fringes with a positive sense of transgression”. Sure, but economic displacement kills custom. Giovanni’s Room, City Lights and Quimby’s and others have only survived because they bought their premises in an act that was a hedge against gentrification.

The radical booktrade in the USA had its problems of course – 90% of feminist bookstores and black bookstores closed within a few years. The high water mark of black bookstores was between 1965 and 1979 when their number grew from around a dozen to between 75 and 100. But times change. Beyond the time frame of this book, in the States, so far this year 23 BIPOC (black, indigenous, and other people of color) bookstores have opened. This must be due to the impact of Black Lives Matter. The earlier range of black bookshops included places affiliated with the Black Panthers and other militant groups whereas Mahogany Books in Washington (online



since 2007, physical since 2017 and now with a second outlet in Maryland) had a surprise visitor to a recent meeting of their regular online book group... one Barack Obama.

Most of the bookshop workers interviewed saw their premises as a shelter from the storm. Kinder describes these as “filtered offstage places [that] provided social support for processing and grieving not simply because likeminded people were present but also because opposition groups were absent”. This was in the era of Trump, though some of the women’s bookshops had a longer term caring role for those, sometimes literally, escaping patriarchy.

And radical bookshops are often there for the long haul. In the two years Kimber took to write the book, several of the places she covered closed down, but their average lifespan was twenty-eight years. Wild Iris, Minnehaha, Rainbow, Modern Times, Boxcar, Calamus, Internationalist had served a generation. She writes that “Closing is not failing” as “these venues leave lasting, life-altering impressions” which “encourage new generations of activists to find updated ways to get durable spaces back on the map as part of the infrastructure of dissent.”

So welcome City of Asylum, Violet Valley, Café con Libros, Black Feminist Library, Mahogany, Uncle Bobbie’s, Nuestra Palabra and the others that opened in the same two years. I look forward to reading how they fare in years to come.

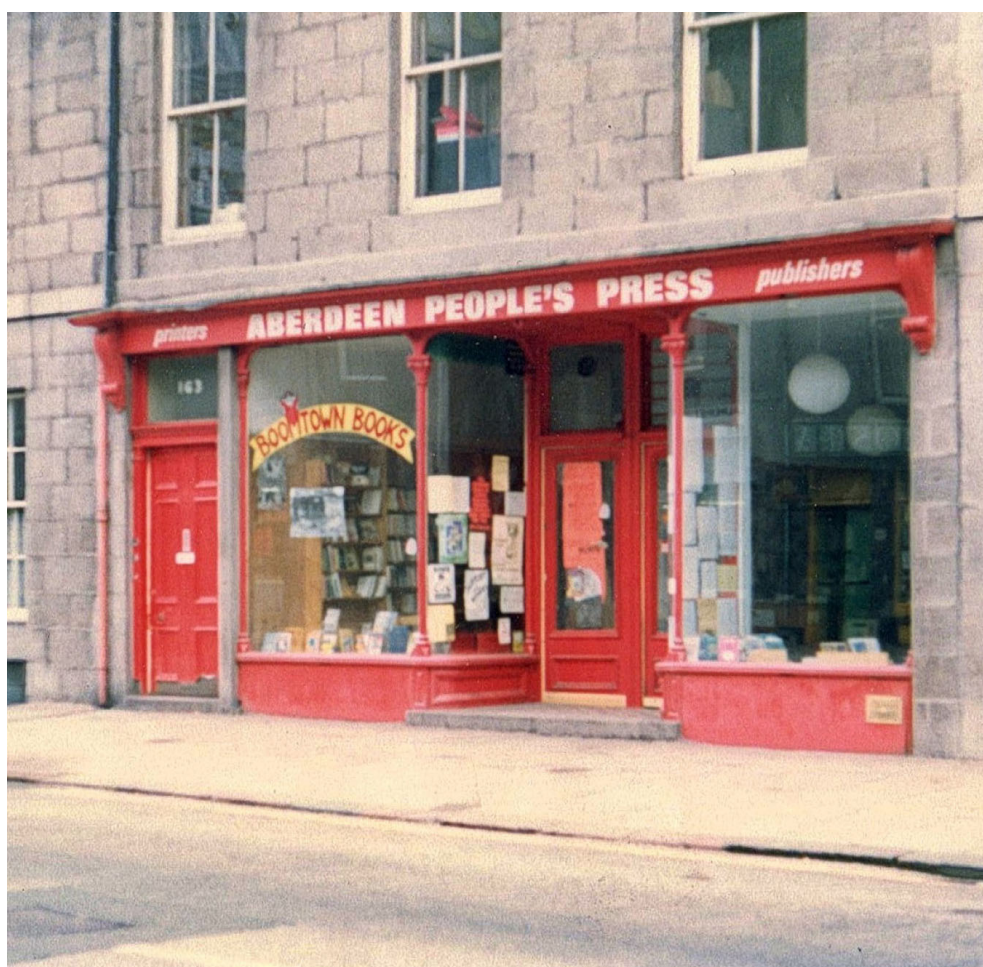
*The Radical Bookstore* should be bought, of course, from your nearest radical bookshop.

\**The Feminist Bookstore Movement* by Kristen Hogan (Duke, 2016)

# Bits and Bobs

## Boomtown Books

'Aberdeen's Radical Bookshop' was formed in late 1976 and based at 167 King Street (later extending into 165 King Street). The shop shared the same site with Aberdeen People's Press and Ambrosia Wholefoods. The shop sold radical books and magazines, was a disseminator of local information from campaign groups and also acted as a base for groups (such as Aberdeen Against The Poll Tax in the late 80s/early 90s). The founder was Alison MacNaughton and later it became a co-operative.



*Photo from the peacock and the worm: press pack*

©Margarate Lochrie

An exhibition about Aberdeen People's Press was on until 25 September 2021, curated by former members (of Aberdeen People's Press), the University of Aberdeen and Peacock Visual Arts.

More information about the exhibition is currently available via this link to the press pack: <https://we.tl/t-23hnjwzU9J>

## Your Dreams

Dave Cope is looking for some lighter material for his research into the Radical Book Trade, and would welcome details of anyone's dreams about any aspect of the trade. As long or brief as you like, with or without any explanation or background, the intent is not to analyse them but to see if there are any themes which emerge – the everyday or the traumatic, people, places or books.

Please just indicate if any are recurring. And let me know if you wish to remain anonymous in the event that I do write a short section about them.

## Mandy Vere

In 1976 Mandy started work at News from Nowhere, which had opened two years earlier in Manchester Street in Liverpool. She retired in August 2021. This is the longest period any worker has been in one shop in the radical book trade – and possibly the book trade in general, over this period.

She was a key person in setting the shop up as a women-only workers' co-operative in 1984, and with subsequent moves to better premises. With her co-workers, she has established News from Nowhere as an important site in Liverpool's cultural as well as political scene.

She is a much-loved activist in the Liverpool feminist and radical movements and in the wider radical book trade. Mandy has been fully involved in the Federation of Alternative Booksellers and its successor the Federation of Radical Booksellers and more recently in the Alliance of Radical Booksellers. Practically anyone who has worked in the radical book trade will know her – News from Nowhere, and especially Mandy with her huge experience and enthusiasm, were always ready to help out in any national trade initiatives and to give advice to new shops.

She will now have more time to spend with her grandchild and her many other interests which have been neglected by the demanding life of a full-time radical bookseller.

We all wish her the very best for her retirement.

# News and Links

Info about *A Beautiful Idea*, new book on history of Freedom Press:

<https://freedompress.org.uk/product/a-beautiful-idea-history-of-the-freedom-press-anarchists/>

Article on the history of Public House Bookshop in Brighton:

<https://unbound.com/boundless/2019/12/05/more-than-a-bookshop/>

## Housmans

In Newsletter 2 we told you about On The Record's work with Housmans and 'Peace House' to mark their 60th anniversary.

The project has now been completed, with the launch in July of <https://5callyroad.org/>, an immersive website celebrating the history of 5 Cally Road. It contains creative work made by young volunteers inspired by the history of the building, and a digital archive of oral history, photographs and documents. Please visit!

On the same subject, two articles:

One by Tom Willis, who helped to set up Housmans, in *Peace News*, January 2010

<https://peacenews.info/node/4030/man-who-made-it-all-possible>

And one in the *Islington Gazette*, prompted by the website launch: <https://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/60-years-of-radical-activism-at-housmans-8112828>

# OBITUARIES

**Jan Seed** (Grass Roots and Scottish & Northern)

[www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/jan-seed-obituary](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/jan-seed-obituary)

**Mike Don** (Grass Roots and Mole Express)

[www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jul/04/mike-don-obituary](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jul/04/mike-don-obituary)

**Jon Carpenter** (EOA, Oxford)

[www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19586116.obituary-radical-bookseller-activist-jon-carpenter/](http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19586116.obituary-radical-bookseller-activist-jon-carpenter/)

**Tenebris Kali Light** (Birmingham Peace Centre and Brilliance Books)

<https://tenebrislight.muchloved.com/>