



Bookshops are the heartbeat of our neighbourhoods

"So please, oh please, we beg, we pray, go throw your TV set away, and in its place you can install, a lovely bookshelf on the wall." So said Roald Dahl in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Local bookshops are more than just storefronts filled with shelves of stories; they are vibrant community hubs that nurture curiosity, foster connection, and preserve the literary heartbeat of our neighbourhoods. While the community bookcase at East Finchley station has thankfully reappeared, many of us are still mourning the closure of Black Gull Bookshop in the High Road last year.

Diana Cormack and Ruth Anders have turned the page by visiting the Black Gull Flies South bookshop in Sussex and the new Muswell Hill Books & Parlour in Muswell Hill.

My final delivery to an old favourite

By Diana Cormack

During my many years of delivering The Archer along the High Road, I always enjoyed visiting Black Gull Bookshop. I confess that when it opened in 2008, I did not think it would last as long as it did.



Read all about it: Diana with The Archer outside the Black Gull Bookshop in St Leonards. Photo Ian Cormack

Happily, it became a popular and much admired centre for the huge and varied range it stocked, attracting customers from great distances to East Finchley.

Visiting Black Gull was always like stepping back in time, with row upon row of bookshelves stacked high, crammed with delight for second-hand book searchers, and there was somewhere for browsers to sit and read. Sadly, all that pleasure was lost to us with last year's closure.

But last month while paying a visit to my brother-in-law in Hastings, I took a trip just up the Sussex coast to St Leonards on Sea, where every avid Archer reader knows that Black Gull owner Chris Overfield landed

after leaving East Finchley (see p4 August 2024).

Black Gull Flies South is settled at 34 London Road, surrounded by antique/second-hand shops and some strange establishments that make you wonder just what they are selling.

The hand-painted signs outside and stacked shelves inside were reminiscent of its former home in N2, though the larger interior seemed lighter and brighter perhaps due to the extensive window frontage.

On my flying visit, I did not know the shop assistant at the till, but he knew about The Archer and happily took the copy I had taken with me for my last delivery to Black Gull.

A new chapter in Muswell Hill

By Ruth Anders

When our beloved Black Gull Books in East Finchley closed its doors 18 months ago (since sitting empty), residents mourned the loss of a treasure trove for literary wanderers. The shelves that once groaned with history, poetry, forgotten classics and local folklore stood empty, and regulars were deprived of the soothing hush found among well-thumbed pages and creaky floorboards.

But now a short walk or bus ride from East Finchley a new hand-painted sign has appeared at 190 Fortis Green Road, reading 'Muswell Hill Books & Parlour' and behind this rebirth is former Black Gull associate Chris Masson.

At the new shop, which opened last month, Chris greets visitors with the same gentle enthusiasm that made Black Gull a sanctuary for so many. There's a sense of continuity with old regulars from N2 reuniting over discussions of rare finds, and local writers already inquiring about readings and events.

The ethos remains unchanged: a haven for readers, a champion of local voices, an advocate for the serendipity of stumbling upon a book you never knew you needed.

With a lifelong interest in literature and music, some years ago Chris opened his own shop Boom Cat Books in Camden Town, the sister shop of Black Gull. A quirky, unique treasure trove of rare art and literature, Boom Cat outgrew its little space and closed.

Multi-use space

Having returned to Muswell Hill with their family, Chris and his partner Katrina are combining their skills and experience to create a multi-use space: a bookshop selling carefully



Well stocked: Owner Chris Masson in his new bookshop in Muswell Hill. Photo Mike Coles

curated second-hand books, artwork and rare music items, and a 'Parlour' to host children's and grown-up events.

Through her company 'Kat's Whiskers' Katrina has been a children's party entertainer and family event organiser for 15 years. She has organised family parties all over London, and staged kids shows at festivals such as Latitude, Secret Garden Party, and Boom Town Fair.

Although not a fan of social media, Chris knows that financial success will involve online sales. He told us: "Our new market will be totally different from Camden Town where our buyers were transient and often tourists. The stock will be similar to that of Black Gull, perhaps leaning a little to the

Left!" Chris has worked hard to stock the shop with a variety of offerings.

We wish him well and look forward to many visits. For more information see <https://www.muswellhillbooks.co.uk>

From The Archer archives...

By Jane Marsh

**10 years ago:
October 2015**

In their last chance to show support for East Finchley Library, local residents were led by actor and author Rebecca Front in a noisy and good-natured demonstration march against library closures in Barnet. They set off from East Finchley Library and walked to Church End Library, where they were greeted by a brass band and decorated open-top bus full of supporters. The march ended at North Finchley Library. Afterwards, the East Finchley Library Users Group thanked participants for their "brilliant" support and, ten years later, all three libraries are still open.

**15 years ago:
October 2010**

The Bobath Centre, a charity for children with cerebral palsy, was targeted by thieves, who stripped all the lead from the roof of their building in East End Road, N2. The theft not only caused a lot of damage to the roof, but also resulted in widespread internal water damage and a very expensive repair bill for the charity.

**25 years ago:
October 2000**

A petrol crisis and fuel protests closed local garages and brought temporary quiet to the roads of East Finchley. This prompted a mixed response from local residents, whose views were highlighted and discussed in The Archer. While there was far less commuter parking, cleaner air and more people shopping locally, some locals complained of journeys to work becoming a nightmare and many businesses suffered reductions in trade.

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Summerlee memories

The Summerlee Estate, made up of Summerlee Avenue and Gardens plus Cherry Tree Road, N2, turns 100 this year, construction having started in 1925.

Now a history of the estate is being prepared by long-time resident Roger Chapman and he is keen to hear stories and memories about the people who lived there and the changes that have taken place over that 100 years.

If you have stories, memories, photos, knowledge or documents that cast a light on its history please drop him an email at: roger.chapman99@btinternet.com