



## Bookshop Says: The RISC Bookshop



because it's such a joy to spend 15 minutes every now and then during the day reading a children's story, it's my favourite part of the job!"  
Liz Allum - Book Shop Co-ordinator

The bookshop, and the fair trade shop is unique, not just for the contents of the shelves, but because it is staffed by a very small and dedicated team of paid staff, and an

army of volunteers, who stock shelves, serve customers, and alphabetise books. Without these invaluable people, RISC wouldn't be able to achieve all the amazing things that it does; they can be found all through the organisation, from the sustainable forest roof garden, to answering the phones in the offices.

"The events that take place in the bookshop are fantastic; turning a book into a complete experience by meeting the author, hearing stories and asking questions. We've had a huge range of events, from a launch event for George Monbiot's new book *Heat*, where we crammed 120 people in, to a fascinating look at the latest works from the British Museum's Africa galleries, by its curator Chris Spring, author of *Angaza Afrika*."

Nathan Edwards - World Shop Co-ordinator

"I've been shopping at RISC, in the World Shop for years, and the bookshop is my favourite part. The range of books is amazing, and I've not found anywhere else that stocks such important and life changing titles. I've just finished reading *Miss Chopsticks*, by Xin Ran, which I found incredibly insightful and interesting, shedding so much light on Chinese culture in both the city and countryside. We seem to get such extreme pictures of China through the media, and I think we forget how many similarities there are between people and places the world over. I'd recommend it to anyone."

Jude Brindley - Book Shop customer, and member of the Bookclub.

**In this new regular feature we profile an independent bookshop and ask them to tell us all about their business, their books and what their staff and customers are reading. This month we visit the RISC bookshop in Reading, which brings world literature to Britain, a section of publishing which is becoming increasingly popular.**

There has been a bookshop and tea dealers at number 35-39 London Street since 1817, with a variety of illustrious owners. It has been owned by the charity RISC, (Reading International Solidarity Centre) for the past 12 years. The three buildings are home to several other charities, a large global Café, serving fair trade tea and coffee and Ethiopian food, and one of the largest Fair Trade shops in the UK.

Now, we have over 9000 titles, on a wide range of issues, from human rights, ethical living, globalisation and the environment, to books about many different countries around the world. We specifically stock books about the Majority World, by which we mean Africa, South and Central America, the Caribbean and Asia, especially those by authors from those areas, and often source rare and unusual books from publishers around the world, such as Jacana, the South African publishers.

"We really want to promote, celebrate and showcase the often unpublicised achievements of authors around the world, and bring their perspective on our rapidly changing world to adults and children in this country. When so many bookshop shelves these days tend to be filled with titles from European male writers, it's great to see authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, (author of *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a*



*Yellow Sun*) winning prestigious awards, and we hope that many more less well known authors will soon get the recognition they deserve as well."

Liz Allum - Book Shop Co-ordinator

The shop also has a large section of fantastic children's books and teaching materials, such as *Pretty Salma*, a new book from Niki Daly, a contemporary Nigerian version of *Little Red Riding Hood*. There are so few books for children that depict urban life in African countries, making this fantastic and vibrant storybook a real gem. It has proved really popular with local parents and teachers.

One of the most popular sections of the bookshop with our customers is the fiction section. The range of novels and poetry from authors from around the world is a mixture of mainstream books, such as the ever popular *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, and less well known ones, such as *The Book Of Not* by Tsitsi Dangarembga .

The RISC Bookclub, which is hosted by Liz Allum, the bookshop co-ordinator, and has around 30 members, chooses its titles with the same criteria as the bookshop itself, and meets once a month above the bookshop to discuss the latest title, over a packet of fairtrade biscuits and some coffee or wine from the café downstairs.

"Every book that we stock has been fairly heavily researched before it was ordered, and will fit in with our criteria for the bookshop and for what we want to promote in the local community. So I do have to spend quite some time getting to know each of the titles in the shop. Particularly, I make sure that I read every children's book before it goes on the shelves, partly for the knowledge and ability to answer some of the very specific enquiries that we get, but also



[www.risc.org.uk](http://www.risc.org.uk)

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