

By Shaun Bythell

# THE DIARY OF A BOOKSELLER

# The author

- Shaun Bythell is the owner of The Bookshop in Wigtown, Scotland's National Book Town, and also one of the organisers of the Wigtown Festival.

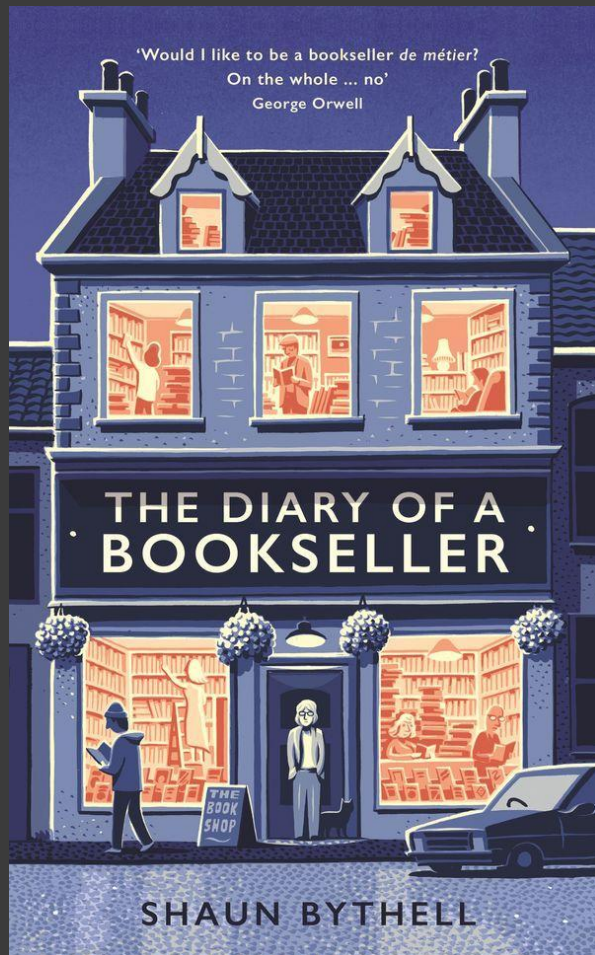
When not working amongst The Bookshops mile of shelving, Shauns hobbies include eavesdropping on customers, uploading book-themed re-workings of Sugarhill Gang songs to YouTube and shooting Amazon Kindles in the wild.



# Brief summary

- ◎ Shaun Bythell owns The Bookshop, Wigtown - Scotland's largest second-hand bookshop. It contains 100,000 books, spread over a mile of shelving, with twisting corridors and roaring fires, and all set in a beautiful, rural town by the edge of the sea. A book-lover's paradise? Well, almost ... In these wry and hilarious diaries, Shaun provides an inside look at the trials and tribulations of life in the book trade, from struggles with eccentric customers to wrangles with his own staff, who include the ski-suit-wearing worker. He takes us with him on buying trips to old estates and auction houses, recommends books (both lost classics and new discoveries), introduces us to the thrill of the unexpected find, and evokes the rhythms and charms of small-town life, always with a sharp and sympathetic eye.

# Characters



- “Really bookish people are a rarity, although there are vast numbers of those who consider themselves to be such. The latter are particularly easy to identify – often they will introduce themselves when they enter the shop as ‘book people’ and insist on telling you that ‘we love books’. They’ll wear T-shirts or carry bags with slogans explaining exactly how much they think they adore books, but the surest means of identifying them is that they never, ever buy books...”

- ◎ «I have lost count of the number of times people have brought books to the counter that we have yet to price up and said, 'This one's got no price on it. It must be free.' It wasn't funny the first time, and fourteen years later it has completely lost the sheen it never had in the first place».
- ◎ «One of today's online orders was for a book about instruments measuring radioactivity, for a customer in Iran».
- ◎ «I asked him if he would like a bag, to which he replied, 'Probably.' I am quite certain that is the first time anyone has given that answer in the shop».

# Nicky

- ⦿ “She spent much of the day trying to convince me to eat some. The only thing I’m convinced of is that she is trying to kill me”.
- ⦿ “Tracy dropped in this morning to say hello. It is her birthday today.  
Me: ‘Happy birthday, Tracy, hope you have a lovely day.’  
Nicky: ‘Well, Tracy, you’re one year closer to death’.
- ⦿ «Nicky back in again. The first thing she said was, ‘Do you want some bramble jam? Well, it’s not really jam. And it’s pretty disgusting, it’s far too sweet and I put chilli powder in it too. It might be quite nice with some meat».

# Anna

- ◎ «Anna's love of Galloway is passionate and deep, and she is determined both to market the region to the world and to protect it from anything that she perceives might prove detrimental to it, particularly to the tourist industry, on which so much of the local economy depends».

# Other

- “Captain has continued to put on weight, and customers rarely fail to comment on his size”.





# Customers

- Mrs Phillips (I am ninety-three years old and blind, you know).
- Mr Deacon:
- “At 11 a.m. the telephone rang – it was Mr Deacon: ‘My apologies for the quality of the line. I am in Patagonia. Could you order me a copy of *In Patagonia* by Bruce Chatwin?’”
- “Telephone call from Mr Deacon asking if he could order a copy of Alison Weir’s *Eleanor of Aquitaine*. I asked him if he was quite sure, as we had recently ordered a copy for him. He paused, then replied, ‘Oh yes, I can see it on my desk. Where’s my list? Yes, I meant David Starkey’s *Henry*. Could you order that?’ I assured him that it would be here by the end of the week”
- Sandy the tattooed pagan turned up with some more sticks”.

# And other....

- ⦿ “He had recently lost his wife, but seemed surprisingly cheery in spite of this. Or perhaps because of it”.
- ⦿ “The shop received an anonymous postcard this morning, so I posted it on Facebook. Hopefully it will trigger more. It was a picture of a bronze lion, and on the back it just read: ‘a large portion of the *Oxford English Dictionary* was written by a murderer from a mental institution”.
- ⦿ “Two complete strangers came into the shop at the same time and in an extraordinary coincidence both asked at the same time for a copy of Gavin Maxwell’s *House of Elrig*. Sadly we don’t have a copy or I could have orchestrated a bidding war”.

- ◉ “Woman: ‘I was in your shop during the book festival and found a book about old ruined gardens of Scotland in your new books section. Could you tell me what the title is?’  
Me: ‘No, I am afraid not. I know the book you’re after and would be happy to sell you a copy, though.’  
Woman: ‘Why won’t you tell me the title?’  
Me: ‘Because as soon as I do you’ll just go and buy it on Amazon.’  
Woman: ‘No, I’ll send my mother round to pick it up from you.’  
Me: ‘Oh good, in that case can I take your credit card details and your mother’s name? I’ll put it to one side once you’ve paid for it.’  
At this point she hung up.”

- ◉ “Telephone call this morning:  
Caller: ‘Hello! Hello! I think I have got the wrong number, is that Allison Motors?’  
Me: ‘You have got the wrong number, this is The Book Shop.’  
Caller: ‘Never mind, you might be able to help. Have you got an alternator for a Vauxhall Nova?’”

- ⦿ “Closed due to hangover”.
- ⦿ “The first customer of the day asked ‘Who wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*?’ I told her it was Harper Lee, to which she replied, ‘Are you sure it wasn’t J. D. Salinger?’”
- ⦿ “The interviewee was an elderly woman who evidently did not understand that Stewart was trying to extract more than ‘yes/no’ answers from her. Eventually, in despair, he decided that he would ask her ‘What did Hitler smell like?’, at which point she opened up completely and gave him all the material he could have hoped for”.

# Particular qualities

- ⦿ There is no action and some plot twists
- ⦿ Quotes of George Orwell, which gives us the main thoughts and description.