



Questions for: Alan Staton

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The director of strategy and communication at the Booksellers Association contributes to our Q&A series



Describe your current job

Standing up for booksellers and communicating to the world what a fantastic, vibrant retail sector UK and Irish bookselling is.

What was your first job in the book industry?

Christmas temp at Bertrams after University.

How has the industry changed since your first job?

It's all ancient history now; net pricing, no Amazon. When BBC Books bought out the tie-in to the latest Delia Smith or Michael Palin series there was a trade-wide bonanza. The flip side of that is bookselling is so much more creative and innovative now.

"Audio could be a bigger existential threat to bookshops than ebooks appeared to be"

What's the biggest challenge in your job?

It's less challenging than it used to be. Ten years ago, many people in the industry and in the media weren't so appreciative of bookselling. That has changed - and the BA has worked hard to change it. As far as government is concerned, we seem to have got to a place where there is widespread acceptance that things need to change - the broken system of business rates, the need to reinvigorate high streets - but any movement is glacial to the point of non-existent.

What are the most interesting things you're seeing at the moment in the industry?

Booksellers taking the initiative in their towns and communities. Becoming Place Makers; leading their high streets to reinvigoration; creating new bookselling models.



What do you think might be the next big thing?

Audio. It's the current big thing, of course, but is going to get a lot bigger, and I'm worried that booksellers will be left behind by it through no fault of their own. The societal migration from the written word to the spoken word is already probably much greater than most of us perceive. In our industry the market shift to audio could be profound. It could be a bigger existential threat to bookshops than ebooks appeared to be.

What do you most like doing when you're not working?

I'm currently trying to wean myself off spending so many of my waking hours worrying about Brexit, when there is so little I can do about. I love my adopted home county of Norfolk and enjoy spending time walking; there is always something new to discover.

What is the best book you've read in the last year?

I've just finished the new Kate Atkinson novel and loved it. It's been a long wait for the return of Jackson Brodie.

How do you like to read: on screen, on paper, or do you listen to audio books?

If I analysed it, I'd probably surprise myself. Books on paper. But I'm a bit of a news junkie and I probably consume more of that on screen than through newspapers, even though I still read them.

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