

**From:** Campden Book Shop  
**Sent:** 05 February 2006  
**To:** Alan Shearman

Considerable interest has been aroused by the proposed takeover of Ottakers by the WHSmith/HMV/Waterstone conglomerate. Some might say, surely some mistake. Books ? Interesting ? . What are you getting excited about ? . I suggest that people are interested because what is happening in the book industry reflects what is happening elsewhere in our other shopping experiences and we feel it is time to make a noise. There has been a decline in our high streets which we want to reverse. We enjoy shopping and want it to continue to be a lively and personal experience. Our cry is not just to the Competition Commission but to Town Councils, Planners and MP's

Stratford and its outlying communities want a diversity of shopping experiences so anything which reduces diversity in Stratford and other regional towns up and down the country should be discouraged. Stratford people want to enhance the attractiveness of the town to visitors and should seek to attract Independent retail outlets whether to sell books or anything else. Independents are attractive to shoppers who want service, advice tailored to the individual customer and a personable experience. Chains are attractive to people who want an anonymous self service experience. The chains, whether in food or book retailing have to deal anonymously, directing as many consumers as possible to the product that is attractive to the largest possible community. Ideal for London suburbs but not for Stratford.

The second point is a specific book industry point. Independent Bookshops, offering advice and service rather than a "pick up, queue and pay" or PQP option nevertheless depend on publishers to continue to publish a wide range of what we call back lists. Books previously issued by authors. Classic examples would be books by Solzhenitsyn, books that were world wide sellers in the seventies and which we in the independent trade aim to stock and sell as seriously good examples of Modern Russian Literature. These books are now out of print and have dropped out of the public eye. By any definition of quality they are in the top tier of Russian novels and are of interest to book sellers who give advice and who tailor their offerings to individual customers. However they are not currently published because both publishers and chains focus on the PQP market which requires less individual attention. The publishers, who themselves offer bigger promotion budgets and bigger discounts on the latest publications, are compliant in this practice. So a situation is beginning to develop in which supply is restricted. This has a disproportionately unfavourable impact on the Independents who rely on a wide range of books to service their offering to customers. The chains are not impacted because their PQP economic model is achieved with a steady flow of new books coming onto the market.

The third is that independent bookshops have to adapt to survive. By our very nature we evolve and transform ourselves to meet the customer's requirements. An example of this is the growth of the internet. In recent years Independents have learnt to profit from using both local high street and internet channels. Some of the best web shopping sites are provided by Independents. Most of the time it is hugely enjoyable and a place where passion and drive can be very rewarding. In a world where consumer choice is accelerating Independents whether they sell cheese or books will always have a place as enjoyable shopping experiences.

David Kingsmill  
Campden Book Shop