

MEET THE ARTIST:

Thomas Shepherd

ESTHER LAFFERTY



Oxfordshire Artweeks artist Thomas Shepherd is inspired by ‘books, buildings, and beyond’; and he loves to explore and illustrate stories, the places where stories can be found and the routes between them. As an author and artist, one of his most recent projects is to travel around the country visiting independent bookshops and drawing both these and the landmarks and landscapes he discovers on his way.

These will become an illustrated Booklover’s Guide to Bookshops because, says Shepherd, books and stories and words are important, and bookshops are universally beautiful places, often housed in fascinating buildings such as former chapels or old stations. With more than 860 independent bookshops in the British Isles to visit, review and draw, this is no small task. In the meantime, Shepherd’s annual wall calendars offer great sneak previews of some of the places which will appear in this forthcoming guide.

Although Derbyshire born and Suffolk bred, Shepherd now lives in Oxfordshire and so it is here that he has chosen to start his choice of bookshops for his 2025 Booklover’s Guide to Bookshops Wall Calendar with the new Daunt Books in Summertown.

This Oxford location opened in 2020 yet with its dark wood shelves and a surprisingly



Daunt Books, Oxford

large interior, it feels as if it could have stood here much longer. Daunt Books, Marylebone, London, was founded in 1990 by James Daunt in premises that had been a book shop for many years prior to this. An extraordinary Victorian building, it was originally home to the antiquarian booksellers, Francis Edwards who claimed to be the first custom-built bookshop in the world. When the first Daunt bookshop opened, it was a specialist travel bookshop, and a place and travel theme still influences their bookshops’ layouts.

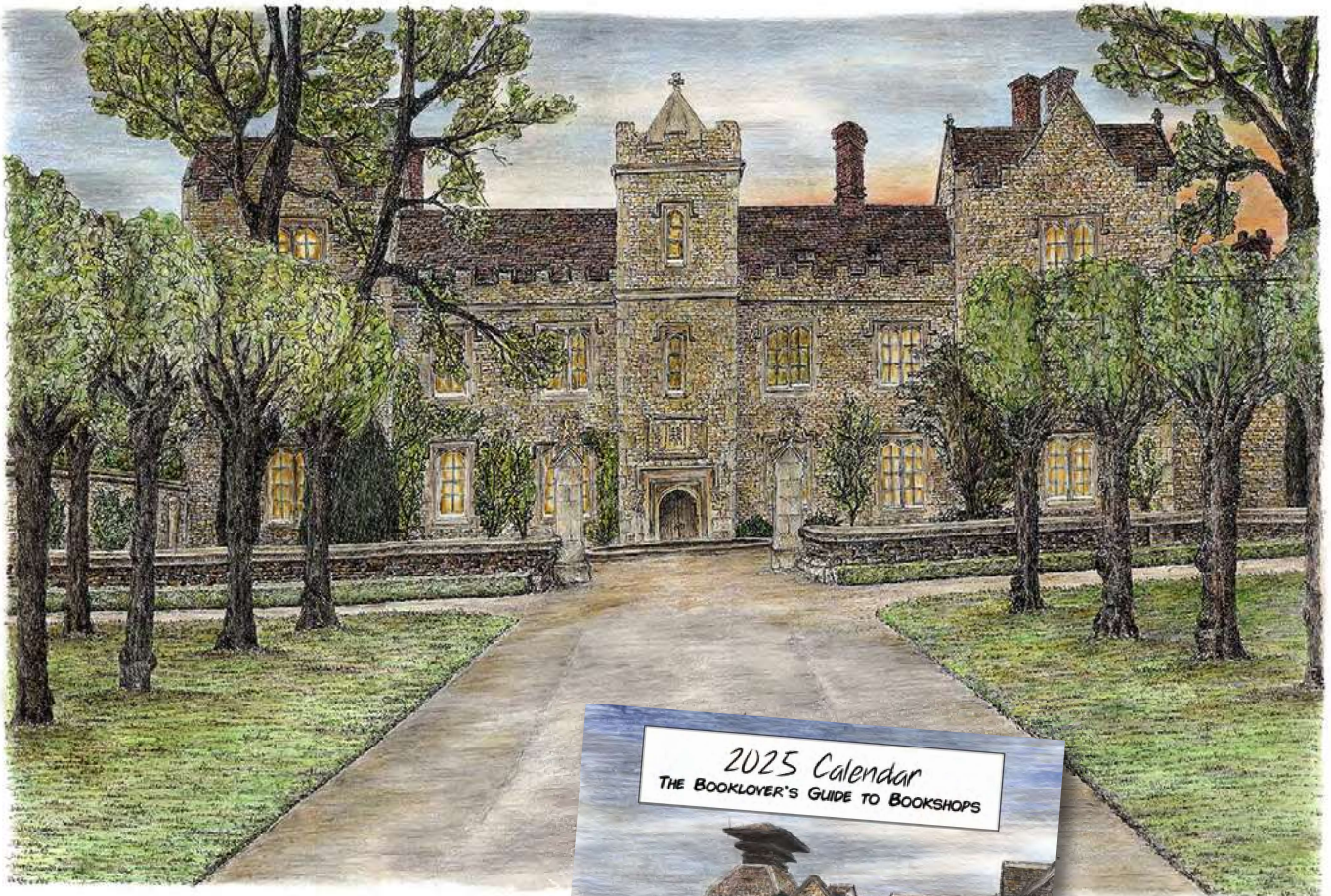
“In Summertown, travel, fiction and nonfiction books for different geographical areas grouped together so you can choose a part of the world to visit through the pages on the shelves,” says Shepherd, “so this seemed the perfect place to start a cross-country calendar of bookshops which quickly spreads its wings. A trip there reminds you of all the wonderful places there are to visit. My 2025 calendar stretches 500 miles north to south, and over 350 miles east to west, and all roads have to pass through Oxfordshire to get there!”

Thomas has been much inspired by two artists, the first of whom is twentieth-century book author and illustrator Edward

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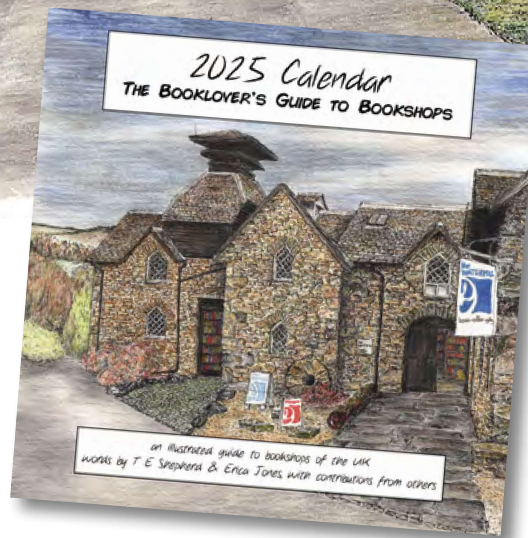


Oxfordshire's Weston Manor

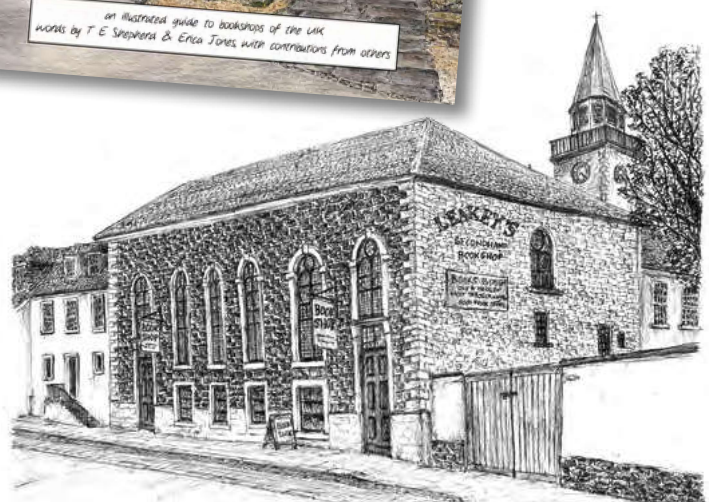
Ardizzone whose style is characterised by loose, expressive line work with delicate cross-hatching muted watercolour washes, and a warm, nostalgic quality. The other, Reginald John 'Rex' Whistler, was a British artist who was killed in action in Normandy in World War II. Whistler's art is characterised by intricate, whimsical, and often fantastical scenes, blending elements of neoclassicism with surrealism and they often elaborate architectural details, with a sense of story and enchantment.

His style lying somewhere between the two, Thomas works principally in Indian Ink and Polychromos artists' pencils, occasionally adapting these into etchings.

Other illustrations in the new calendar include Leakey's in Inverness which Thomas was eager to visit having happened upon it in an online list of the 'most beautiful bookstores in the world'. Each month, Shepherd's calendar includes a written commentary on his chosen bookshop, many by his long-term collaborator Erica Jones (@bookshopblogger on Twitter and Instagram). On Leakey's, which stands a block away from the famous Grieg Street Bridge over the River Ness (a pedestrian suspension bridge dating back to 1881), another reader describes it as a Wonderland in a former church. Inside there are row upon row of books, a big wood-burning stove in the centre of the room



an illustrated guide to bookshops of the UK words by T. E. Shepherd & Erica Jones with contributions from others



Leakey's Bookshop, Inverness

'throwing out waves of blessed warm', the perfect place for a 'literary communion'. Closer to home, Thomas has also included The Yellow-Lighted Bookshop in Stroud, a store named for the book of the same title. The book is a memoir and a history by Lewis Buzbee in which he celebrates the unique experience of the bookstore – the smell and ▶

touch of books, the joy of getting lost in the deep canyons of shelves, and the silent community of readers. Rich with anecdotes, this is a fascinating historical account of the bookseller trade from the Great Library of Alexandria, one of the largest and most significant libraries of the ancient world to Shakespeare & Co, the Paris bookstore opened by American-born bookseller and publisher Sylvia Beach in 1919 from where she published James Joyce's book *Ulysses* (1922) and encouraged Ernest Hemingway to publish his early work. Standing at 12 rue de l'Odéon, it was a gathering place for the great bohemian writers of the time – including Gertrude Stein, F Scott Fitzgerald and TS Eliot – as well as for leading French writers. This original bookshop was at the heart of the Paris literary scene for decades, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s. Its reincarnation on the Left Bank dates back to 1951 and continues to be a mecca for those who love new and second-hand books. The shop's motto, 'Be Not Inhospitable to Strangers Lest They Be Angels in Disguise', is written above the entrance to the reading library inviting aspiring writers, artists, and intellectuals to visit and sleep between the hallowed shelves. An estimated 30,000 young and young-at-heart writers and artists have since stayed, including then unknowns such as Alan Sillitoe, Kate Grenville, Sebastian Barry, and Ethan Hawke.

"That's an iconic bookshop I'd love to visit – and expand my bookshop travels to beyond the British Isles," Shepherd continues. "It would be great if all bookstores let you stay overnight but I'd never get any sleep."

Other bookshops which Thomas has included in his 2025 calendar – and visiting challenge – are Barnes in London, The Edge of the World bookshop in Penzance, and Watermill bookshop in Aberfeldy in the Highlands. With its riverside location and picturesque leaded windows, this old stone mill – also home to an unusual art gallery – will be celebrating its 200th anniversary in 2025.

"I hope my calendar will serve not just as a place to record holidays, birthdays, and when the cat needs their vaccinations, but also can be an inspirational guide, taking people on a road trip around the country to discover for themselves some of these wonderful places, and to continually remind them of the pleasure of choosing a new book and the promise of the places they take you," Shepherd explains.

The Booklover's Guide to Bookshops 2025 Calendar is available for £13.50 from www.teshepherdart.com and from featured bookshops.



Sydney Hobson AKA

Waiter Confidential

Tipping

My least favourite day of the year to work as a waiter is, without doubt, Valentine's Day. Not because I'm a scrooge or because I think that 'every day should be Valentine's Day' but because the timid 17-year-old couples that fill the restaurant always remove the service charge.

I get it, they're young and skint. I can dredge up some empathy for these terrified, spotty teenagers wincing at me through candlelight. There's no excuse for adults.

Now I know, service charge is discretionary. I also know that 'tipping culture' is broadly an American phenomenon that exists due to waiters there getting paid an hourly pittance and therefore relying on the supplements. I have repeatedly heard these comments in the self-congratulatory, condescending tones of the North Oxford middle class as though I was born yesterday in a coal mine, and each new time I hear them it feels like my supervillain origin story.

Though it contains truths, this attitude misses a fundamental aspect of what restaurants and service actually are.

Firstly, having just returned from New York, I can report that the minimum service charge you'll pay there is 20%, whereas no restaurant outside of London is likely to charge you more than 12.5%. So, stop crying Tabitha – if you can afford £100, you can afford £112.50.

Secondly, Barnaby, it's not all going into my pocket just because I served you, and the bit that does gets taxed the same as the revenue from your interior design 'business'. If you actually read the line about service charge (don't worry, it's only printed on every single menu) you'll see that it's shared between the kitchen, floor and bar teams. Regardless of what you think of me, the skill, preparation and finesse that went into every mouthful and sip you've had over the course of 90 minutes is what the service charge reflects.

Which leads me to the final point. People totally misunderstand what good service in a restaurant actually is. Lots of it is down to the waiter, to be sure. My demeanour, attention, punctuality, knowledge, effervescent charm and rugged good looks all contribute to the experience. The point is, however, that if you're presented with cold slop that comes out of the kitchen late, or given a martini that tastes like kerosene, no amount of charm can rectify it.

Good service is like an iceberg. Don't ignore the bulk of the hard work just because I'm at the tip.