

SPREADING THE WORD

A bookshop specialising in Christian literature has marked its 10th anniversary, writes Ruth Clemence

Exeter's Christian resource centre Bridge Books celebrated its 10th anniversary in June. Staff, volunteers and customers got together for food, drink and a time of thanksgiving at the Riverside Church café next door.

Bridge Books was opened in 2008 by John and Margaret Robertson, who strongly felt that Exeter and the region would benefit from a well-stocked Christian bookshop. It was a brave endeavour as five Christian bookshops closed across the Southwest the year they opened.

However, Bridge Books has continued to grow and current owners Gary and Mary Lee continue to plan for growth as they look to the future.

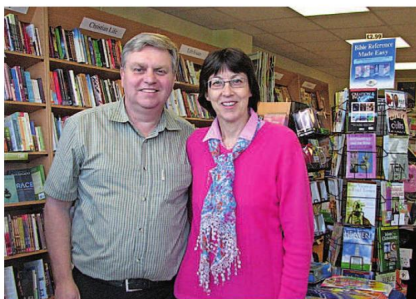
'The main thing about the internet is that if people know what they want, it's easy. The main reason people come to us is because they're not sure what they want'

Besides stocking a wide selection of Bibles and books, there are gifts, artwork, CDs, DVDs and cards available. However, Bridge Books are involved in many more endeavours behind the scenes – participating in over 35 events across the region totalling 85 days of the year.

This has included 'pop-up' bookstalls at events like the Devon County Show and



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Crediton Flower Festival as well as providing resources on a sale or return basis.

They have started hosting their own events including a talk by *Freed from Shame* authors Dawn Holmes and Karen Todd which addresses the stigma of mental illness in the church and bible journaling

workshops with local artist Rachel Povey.

Community and outreach is important to Bridge Books. Working with trust fund Speaking Volumes and relying on generous donations from supporters, they donate 60 to 80 books to over 105 libraries in schools, the prison, the Commando Training Centre, hospitals and hospices.

Uganda and Kenya have also received books from them and Gary and Mary hope to continue donating overseas if additional funding for this outreach continues. At the 2017 Christian Resources Together Awards, which acknowledges the best in publishing and retail, they received the Speaking Volumes Community Impact Award.

Gary is not unaware of the challenges that are facing independent retailers, especially with the rise of the internet, but he does not let this deter him.

"The main thing about the internet is that if people know what they want, it's easy. The main reason people come to us is because they're not sure what they want," explains Gary.

By coming into the shop, customers are able to discover all that is available and ask questions where friendly, knowledgeable staff and volunteers are on-hand to help.

Gary said: "They can touch and feel and look at the items before they buy so they're more sure of what they're purchasing."

Bridge Books is situated at the Exe Bridges roundabout by the river on Okehampton Street and opens from Monday to Saturday 9:30am – 5:00pm. ■ bridgebookshop.co.uk



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