

## Irene Babbidge: the “quintessential personal bookseller”

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Few people have heard of Irene Babbidge today, but her achievements for booksellers were nothing short of extraordinary. In the Restrictive Practices Court’s examination of the Net Book Agreement in 1962 she was called as a witness and has been described as “brilliantly lucid” and “the most forceful and telling” representative for the Publishers Association and the Booksellers Association at that watershed event. This paper explores her part in this legal battle more fully, as well as her wider influence and impact on the booksellers of the mid-twentieth century, via her roles in the Booksellers Association as Chairman of the Education Board and Vice President. She wrote a widely praised handbook of bookshop practice, *Beginning in Bookselling* (1965), which was revised in 1972, and her work within her own community, running the Pelham Bookshop, was also celebrated, with Ian Norrie calling her one of the “formidable” women booksellers of the time. This paper seeks to demonstrate the impact one provincial bookseller can have, not just in their own local context, but nationally, and on issues where resistance to issues of huge cultural importance, such as the Net Book Agreement, mattered culturally to the reading public.

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