

Hub of Dublin

Eason and Son's flagship store in Dublin is the first stop for Ireland's celebrity signings, says Kate Chambré

More than a century after horse-drawn carriages clattered down O'Connell Street in Dublin, a fleet of embassy limousines pulled up outside a bookshop and out stepped former US president, Bill Clinton. Eason & Son first traded in 1886; since then it has become a mecca for celebrity book signings, playing host to Clinton, Pelé, Tony Curtis, Larry Hagman, Nancy Sinatra, Salman Rushdie, Spike Milligan, George Best, David Beckham, and many other famous faces.

"We are the first port of call for all the high-profile selling sessions in Ireland," says Martin Black, general manager. "Celebrities usually appear on RTE's 'Late Late Show', and it's nearly always mentioned that they will be appearing in Eason's the next day. From mid-September onwards we'll have a book signing every Saturday. We find that the Irish are great at welcoming celebrities."

Situated in the heart of the city on one of O'Connell Street's prime sites, the headquarters of Eason & Son owes its origin to the bookselling chain W H Smith. When Smith was appointed chief secretary for Ireland in 1886, he sold his Irish book stalls to his manager Charles Eason to avoid a conflict of interest. Since then, Dublin's flagship store has become the leading retailer of books, magazines, stationery and greeting cards in Ireland, trading on four floors that cover an area of more than 40,000 sq ft.

The family orientated shop—whose

main competitors in Ireland include Waterstone's and Hodges Figgis—has 130 different sections of stock, boasting more than 45,000 titles.

Among the most popular subjects are best-selling and just-published fiction and non-fiction, children's books (the shelves are built at a child-friendly level), travel, Irish history, Irish literature, Irish poetry, Irish plays, popular fiction, politics, gardening, computers, sport and reference. Interestingly, Black reflects, the store's popular psychology section has also been in huge demand—a direct reaction, he believes, to the Celtic Tiger.

Eason's offers more than 4,000 magazine titles, a music store (Tower Records), and a vast selection of seasonal greeting cards; customers can also purchase anything from confectionery, cigarettes, stationery and textbooks to digital cameras and even regional newspapers. For customers who wish to grab a bite to eat, the Muse Café and the smaller Barnies Coffee shop offers them sufficient sustenance and a place to rest their weary feet.

How does Eason's keep afloat in the face of fierce competition? "We have regular book promotions and pay particular attention to feedback from customers," Black says. "We price just-published, bestselling and promotion titles at very special



Eason's O'Connell Street store: a Dublin fixture since 1886

prices, and in media price comparisons, we nearly always come out cheapest."

Keeping one step ahead of the game, the company's electronic stock-control systems have developed a system to allow for an improved reaction to market trends. "Our central buying team is currently sourcing Romanian, Polish and Latvian literature to cater for the many thousands of Eastern European nationals now making Dublin their home," Black adds.

But perhaps the most impressive thing about Eason's is its dedication to supporting the Dublin Adult Learning Centre's annual programme. As one student said: "I went into Eason's and looked at the books on the wall, but just saw pictures. The store inspired me to go away and learn how to read and write. Now that I've learnt, I'm thrilled to be back." And that, possibly, is the greatest accolade any bookstore could hope for.

Speaking volumes: 45,000 titles over 40,000 sq ft



TOP 10—WEEK TO 18TH AUG

Title	Author
1 The Untouchables	Paul Williams
2 The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas	John Boyne
3 Forget	Ruth Gilligan
4 The Historian	Elizabeth Kostova
5 If You Could See Me Now	Cecelia Ahern
6 Zahir	Paulo Coelho
7 We Need to Talk About Kevin	Lionel Shriver
8 The Pope's Children	David McWilliams
9 Perfect Match	Jodi Picoult
10 Past Secrets	Cathy Kelly